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SIX FUNDAMENTALS OF RELIGION

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SIX FUNDAMENTALS OF RELIGION

BY

REV. JOHN A. McCLOREY, S. J.

UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT

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SIX FUNDAMENTALS OF RELIGION

Six Fundamentals of Religion

I

ACTIVITY AND CHEER

"Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean,
And the world has grown gray with Thy Breath."

This blasphemous but beautiful taunt was flung at Christ by one of the decadent poets of the nineteenth century.

The meaning of the words is that the classic world of Rome and Greece was a glad and gorgeous world; Christ came, abhorred it, abolished it, and set up in its place His own world of gloom and passivity. He preached that life is all a thing of sorrow, that the panoramic loveliness of earth is evil, that the imaginative and passionate longings of men for its attractions are wrong, and that therefore men must retire into the chamber of their hearts in contemplative brooding over a dim, chill, and intangible universe of the spirit.

His Church, as Gibbon says, caused the downfall of imperial Rome. She withdrew from the sun of day to live with congregations of ignoble slaves in the bowels of the earth. She fostered the spirit of monkish isolation amid desert sands, away from the healthful habitations of men. She cast her lot with Gothic barbarians from the gloomy fastnesses of the North. In the Middle Ages she mothered monks and nuns who led a life of unnatural self-repression; and today her fundamental meditations and teachings are sin, hell, judgment, death, and a life of sackcloth and ashes, lamentations and tears. The Puritans,—long-faced, hard and cheerless,—tried to make men's lives as bleak and inhospitable as the New England rocks they landed on. At the present time religious pacifists are attempting to change our American lions of war into sheep of unprepared peace. The cheery wine of goodfellowship has been soured into the vinegar of prohibition. Dancing, singing, and festivity in general are branded as frivolous at best, sinful at worst. Hence, as a result of Christianity, there is on the one side the resplendent world with "forbidden" written all over it; on the other side, drab religion,

labelled: "You must accept my austerities or perish!"

This seems to be the idea contained in the words of the poet. At any rate, it is certain that great numbers of men take this view of Christ, Christianity, and the Church. Accordingly, they despise them and cast their lot with the winsome, albeit ruinous, world.

In direct contradiction to the idea that religion is a system of passivity and gloom, I hold and hope to establish that it is a system of activity and cheer.

Life and, therefore, religion must embrace the three fundamental elements: God, Myself, and the World.

Assuming from the four rational proofs of God's existence that God, an all-perfect Being, exists, I say that if He should choose to create a world, He would be bound by His infinite lordship over all things, to make it glorify Him, at least with moral necessity. For if He were to give permission to one iota of it to deviate from Him, to drift through space on its own responsibility, so to speak, without in some manner reverting to and centering in Him, He would thereby cease to be Lord of that iota, cease to be the infinite Lord of all things,

cease to be God; just as the center of a circle would stop being such if it did not require all the radii to center in it.

Let me say in passing that such a requirement on the part of God cannot be interpreted as selfishness or self-interest because being all-perfect, He can have nothing to gain from the world's praises and service. The world is the exclusive gainer by union with God.

Now, as a matter of fact God created the world. Hence everything in it must radiate towards Him. This we call "glorifying God." Rational beings glorify God directly, by knowing, praising, reverencing, loving, and serving Him. All other beings cannot glorify God directly because, not having intellect, they are incapable of union with Him by intellectual acts. Therefore their manner of union with Him is indirect. In other words, they must glorify Him by helping man to do so; they are the means man must employ in going to God.

From this it follows, first, that all the pleasant things of life are good; for products of God's beneficent hands cannot be bad. No thing is or can be bad in itself. Evil comes from the misuse of things.

Sin is evil; but sin is not a thing. It is nothing. It is the negation of thing. It is a privation. For it is a lack of the right attitude of obedience toward the will of God. The *physical* element of sin is a thing and must, therefore, be good. The *moral* element of sin (the non-conformity of the human will with the norm of rectitude) is bad; but that is a negation, a nothing. Second, the only use that may be made of things is in the service of the Creator of them. Third, pleasure may be taken in them if they are thus employed.

It is clear, then, that rational religion demands that man should be active and cheery in life, employing all things with joyous energy in the service of God. Any religion which teaches that pleasant things are bad in themselves, and must be declined by man with unqualified disapprobation in favor of a gloomy and passive aloofness of soul, is evidently a false religion.

Is Christianity such? No, it is not. Christ once said: "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light," seeming to imply with regret that while the former know very well the use of worldly things, the latter do

not. "Why," He seems to say, "should the followers of Satan have the world to themselves, and the children of God so little of it? Why should not Christ's followers display as much enthusiasm in employing the world in God's service, as the wicked do in using it for sin, Satan, and hell?"

He said another time: "You must be simple as doves and wise as serpents," fixing the gaze of dovelike simplicity on Heaven, but also the gaze of serpentine shrewdness on the possibilities of earth in the service of My Father. In a word, Christ's ideal of religion was not a system of gloomy passivity; it was rather an economy of activity and cheer.

He told the parable of the talents: "To one man God gave five talents, to another, two, and to a third He gave one talent. The first two employed their gifts; the third did not. God rewarded the active and rebuked the inert. "Talents" means temporal as well as spiritual gifts. Therefore, the rule of life must be activity and cheer. True, in some cases, God wishes some men to refrain sometimes from using some worldly goods. But this is an exception, and an exception proves the rule.

Christ's Church after Him has acted on the same principle. One of the most common charges against her has been that she is too active and alert in this world. Her enemies would like to see her shut herself up behind monastery walls, and droop in ultra-spiritual aloofness within the sombre silences of the sanctuary, instead of taking her stand in the market place, shops, offices, battlefields, legislative halls, and other active open places of earth. If she did that, worldlings could have things their own way, without hindrance from her. But she knows her mission. Like her Master, she stands in the midst of men and the activities of life.

The Church of Christ has always come to worldly and sinful men with a challenge. At her first appearance on earth, she confronted Judaism, the Roman Empire, and Greek culture, and told them to their face that they should not any longer use things as they pleased; that henceforth she herself was going to employ them to some extent in the service of Heaven. No wonder they persecuted her! They would not have done so if she had maintained an attitude of passive, detached spirituality.

When Constantine won his victory in the fourth century, she allied herself to his empire, not only to benefit it, but also to induce it to glorify God under her spiritual tutelage. From Pepin, King of the Franks, she accepted the Papal States, because she was convinced that temporal power would lend distinction to the religion of Christ in the eyes of the world and that without it she would not be free of state interference in her spiritual dealings with the human race. And though Temporal Power has had its inconveniences, yet no informed person can doubt that in a thousand instances this particular form of earthly influence advanced the cause of peace, civilization, and morality.

In the Middle Ages the Church harnessed the earthly system of philosophy, derived from Aristotle, to the heavenly car of Christianity, making it minister to the doctrines of Christ. At the same period, she allied human learning with supernatural truth in the universities of Paris, Oxford, Salamanca, and the Universities of Italy. She encouraged Religious in their retirement to copy the mundane literature of antiquity so as to help future generations with earthly

means to attain to a heavenly end. With the same idea in mind, she lent her influence to the Renaissance. She withstood browbeating emperors in defense of the natural rights of the people. In the person of Cardinal Bellarmine in his controversy with James I of England, the royal protagonist of the divine right of kings, she was the first to set forth in scientific form, the principles of the divine right of the people, upon which our Republic is built.

And as she interested herself in principles of civil government for God's sake, so she bade the arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry, artistic weaving, carving, knitting, and lace-making, all purely secular activities, to spread out their profuse offerings at the feet of God.

Education is another worldly profession that she has taken in hand for the salvation of souls, because she believes that earthly arts and profane sciences minister to man's last end.

She stands in the midst of the dust, noise, and sweaty energy of the industrial and commercial world, resolving to have her say in regard to the moral issues involved in questions between Labor and Capital. Cap-

ital resents her interference; so does Labor. But judgments as to morality belong to her, and so she will not exchange the character of active arbitress for that of passive spectator.

She resents as strongly as the best of democrats the attempts being made by extremists today to lessen our Republic to an impotent, mob-ruled State or to increase it to a despotism. She is more interested in the family than the mother and father of it. International relationships engage her night and day. And in regard to ecclesiastical ceremonial, she is insistent that silks, satins, velvets, laces and cloth of gold, marble and mosaics, lights, flowers, and music shall not be the exclusive paraphernalia of kingly courts and social events, but shall lend their charm also to the house of God.

Oh if the Church were passive, gloomy, meekly inert, the great world would have no quarrel with her. But the world is jealous of her because she has always preached and exemplified by her conduct, a robust and joyous use of earthly things in the service of Him who created them for His own glory and the use of men.

Of course rulers of the Church, being hu-

man, may have gone too far, on occasions, in applying the principle. Whether they actually did so or not, is not now to the point. The point at issue is whether the Church of Christ has practically believed in a system of inactivity and gloom or in a system of activity and cheer in the service of God. And the answer to the question must be evident from these few instances of her activity in the midst of the world.

Well, then, how answer the taunt of the decadent poet referred to at the opening of this sermon?

In order that the answer to this question may be understood, it will be well to draw a contrast between Christianity and Buddhism, to which Christianity has so often been likened.

Christianity and Buddhism are alike in this, that both of them teach four things: first, that life is sorrowful; second, the sorrows of life are due to attractive things of earth and to man's unsatisfied desire of them; third, therefore the passionate longings of the heart for worldly gratifications must be downed; fourth, after self-repression, man must enter into himself and develop the spirit of contemplation.

But despite the surface similarity between them, the two systems of religion are as far apart as the poles. For, while Buddhism teaches that life is all sorrow, Christianity inculcates the lesson that it is a commingling of sorrow and joy; and if Christ speaks more of sorrow than of joy it is because man needs much urging to submit to sorrow; he needs no encouragement to accept joy.

Second, while Buddhism takes the position that objects of pleasure, wealth, honor, success, power, comforts, luxury, science and art are bad *in themselves,* Christianity insists only on this, that oftentimes things, good in themselves, are bad *for us* on account of misuse. Hence we must not repudiate them utterly. We must only practice moderation in the use of them.

True, it must be admitted, Christ did not say to the rich young man of the Gospel narrative: "Use moderately." But, "Sell all, give to the poor and come, follow Me." Also, He did not say: "Blessed are the moderate users of wealth and power"; but, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

True, also, Christian asceticism imposes vows of worldly renunciation. But ob-

serve: these are only for the few; the few are not commanded, but only invited to eschew by vows certain blessings of earth; and they do so to be freer to use other worldly things with greater efficacy in the service of God. For instance, priests sacrifice individual fatherhood that they may be fathers of all. Missionaries deny themselves the comforts of civilization that they may carry them along with the Faith, to savages. Religious give up the personal possession of money that they may employ money as a community power for the advancement of God's interests.

Moreover, the maintenance of the ascetical ideal in a world given to indulgence is a healthy reminder and deterrent to the indulgent; but it is not an implied condemnation of all pleasure. Even paganism had its Vestal Virgins, embodiments of the ascetical ideal. Also, the espousal of a soul to Christ and its consequent, necessary detachment from all other men or women ought to be intelligible to those who believe in monogamy. Men and women are good; but Christ is better. Preference for Christ does not imply hatred of women and men.

And is it not a fact that the very Church

which encourages virginity has always been, by her prohibition of birth control and divorce, the strongest defender of the family? That the Church which mothers religious poverty, is truly recognized by Socialists today as the bulwark of private ownership? That the Church which inculcates the sacrifice of free will by religious obedience has always fought for the liberties of the people against despotic rule? That the Church which says that the arts, sciences, and philosophy are as nothing in comparison with Faith, has always been the most enthusiastic promoter of the arts, sciences, and philosophy? Yes, these are facts which prove beyond cavil that the Church, with Christ supporting her, does not think that earthly things from which some of her members for high motives choose to abstain, are bad in themselves; does not deny that the moderate use of objects of pleasure is a rational means of serving God. I said: "With Christ backing her." For the Church's attitude toward the use of worldly things is an exact continuation of the attitude of Christ.

"But," an objector may say, "Has Christ supported the Church in this, her atti-

tude towards the world? On the contrary, did He not utterly disown the world?" —We must not overstate anything. Christ possessed and employed many natural blessings. He enjoyed health. He was the most beautiful of the sons of men. Undoubtedly He loved nature. He had a comfortable, if poor, home. He was enriched by the companionship and protection of an incomparable mother. He had friends. He was blessed with a natural power of speech which held men spellbound. He was magnetic in character. He dined with the rich, and was crowned with a veritable triumph on Palm Sunday. There is one incident in His life which graphically illustrates His valuation of the world and its gifts: Shortly before His death, Mary Magdalen lavished on Him the precious contents of her alabaster box. Judas objected, saying that the ointment should have been sold and the price given to the poor. Christ rebuked him, evidently meaning by His rebuke that while nothing was too poor for the Christ, nothing was too rich for Him.

With reference to the Church's attitude towards the world, it must be remembered that absolute rejection of the world is only

a *suggestion* of Christ, not a *command*. Also, multitudes of Religious, and men living *in* the world but not *of* it, have accepted His suggestion to the letter. For instance, the Pope lives in the palatial Vatican, but he lives there like a poor man. The Vatican, St. Peter's at Rome, and indeed all forms of ecclesiastical sumptuousness are for the glory of God and the good of souls, not for the personal comfort and honor of the ecclesiastics. Some ecclesiastics have thought otherwise, but these we disown. However, the great majority of them have acted on the principle of detachment. And why should not the august pageantry of the Church be employed by them, not personally but officially? For if the beauty of Nature glorifies God, why should not the beauty of art, especially architectural art, do so? And if the popular mind is raised to Heaven by the glories of the temple of Nature, why should it not be elevated in like manner by the magnificence of the temple of Michael Angelo?

The martyred Archbishop of Canterbury, as a great modern philosopher says, wore a hairshirt next his skin for his personal holiness, and over it wore the episcopal

purple and cloth of gold for the delight of his poor flock. And his double method of sanctification is symbolic of the Church's.

"Still," I hear some one say: "Christ did not ally in His Church the two things, called personal poverty and ecclesiastical wealth. He was poor in every way." True, He was. But that was because the Church in His day was only in its beginnings, without having the power, as yet, of acquiring wealth and prestige in the world. Also, there is no evidence whatever that Christ disapproved of the earthly grandeur of the Temple of Jerusalem. Hence, there is no reason for thinking that if Christ were the visible head of the Church on earth today, He would not live in the Vatican, officiate in St. Peter's, and in general approve of the architectural art and gorgeous ceremonial of the Catholic Church. Is it conceivable that He would wish to disrobe His Church of the resplendent garments in which the natural arts have arrayed her? No! No more than it may be supposed that He would strip the temple of earth and sky of its loveliness!

Also, there are people who, living in the world, do not abstain from its use. They

use it moderately, not sinfully. Yet Christ's ascetical life is a model also for them. For since men fall short of their ideal; if Christ had set up only an ideal of moderation, they would have fallen short of it and sinned. But since His ideal was abstention, most men who aim at the ideal may not succeed in abstaining utterly; but at least they will be moderate.

Third, while Buddhism would down the passions by annihilation, Christianity would down them only by discipline. Now, the Buddhistic idea is absurd because it is impossible to eradicate the emotional powers of the heart. They lie at the foundation of our being; they are intertwined with the roots of our life; they are a part of human nature itself. We are born with them, and they will stay with us till we die:—these attractions and aversions, these longings for pleasantness, these shrinkings from the disagreeable. True, some predilections die out with increasing age. But meanwhile others, which had been dormant, spring into fierce activity. And even the old man, with spectacles on nose, piping voice and slippered pantaloons, a tremulous shred of humanity, ready for the grave, a burnt-out

volcano, retains to the last the peculiar aversions and likes of senility.

Moreover, even if the annihilation of the passions were possible, it would not be desirable. For what is a man without emotion, but half a man! What is a brain worth without a heart! Thought, without feeling! A piercing mind, without a sympathetic soul! Intellectual light, without warmth of affection! Passion lends strength to action which only passion can give. It enlightens the eyes, inflames the cheeks, and endues our efforts with a sort of ictus which doubles their value. The passions are the sources of terrible pain; but they are also the causes of exquisite delight. They send some men hurtling to hell; but they send other men whirling to Heaven. Without passions a man will not be very bad, but also he will not be very good; he will be only a respectable mediocrity. The difference between a sinner and a saint is not that the one is passionate and the other is not. Both of them have passions. The difference lies in their abuse or use of them. Napoleon and Xavier! Both were ambitious. But what a difference between them on account of the dif-

ferent directions their passions went! We all love those saints most who kept the affections of their heart intact while mounting to the summits of the supernatural. Passion is like steam in an engine; for it drives man forcefully along the directing track of rectitude laid by reason and religion. Without the track there would be no direction. Without the steam there would be no motion.

The world around us is useful and pleasant, and it stands to reason that, since God gave us passions in order that we may employ useful and pleasant things in His service with greater interest and enthusiasm, it would be nothing less than criminal to destroy our passions, even if it were possible. Now this is the crime of Buddhism.

But the passions must be controlled. For they are spontaneous, volcanic, and blind forces which are attracted by the pleasantness and repelled by the repulsiveness of things, without having any appreciation of the rectitude of things. And since many a pleasant thing is wrong (not indeed in *itself* but on account of our misuse of it, as we shall see presently), and since many a disagreeable thing is right, the will must

curtail the activities of passion. This is what Christ taught, and this is the third way that Christianity differs from the cult of Buddha.

Fourth, while Buddhism recommends man to retire into his heart, and there find as his end a sort of passive contentment in the contemplation of himself in particular and truth in general, Christianity teaches that after the process of retirement from the world into self, man ought to rise from the contemplation of self to the consideration of God; and after the consideration of God as his last end, in whom he will find rapture unspeakable, he should return to the world and use it for himself and his neighbor in the service of God. The statue of Buddha, seated, with crossed legs, folded arms, eyes turned in on self and general impassive mien, and the statue of any Christian saint, standing, with arms stretched out and eyes aflame, outward-looking, up towards God and down towards the world, are symbolic of the two religions with regard to the position which introspection holds in their respective systems of holiness.

In view of the fourfold contrast just

drawn between Christianity and Buddhism, it must be evident that Christian asceticism and contemplation on the one hand, and the oriental Nirvana and mysticism, on the other, are a universe apart; and that, therefore, the poet's taunt:

"Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean,
And the world has grown gray with Thy breath,"

is false.

But it may be urged: "Though Christianity in *principle* is not a religion of passivity and gloom, has it not been such in *practice?* For were not the splendor of Rome and 'the glory that was Greece' quenched by the shadow of the Cross?"

No. For the supposition underlying this question, namely, that Rome and Greece were the quintessence of civilization, is not justified. Rome and Greece look glorious to a poet's eye now, at this late date, through the intervening atmosphere of twenty centuries. But in the plain light of history Rome and Greece are known to have been the concentration of corruption and misery. A few men were cultivated and rich; but the bulk of the people were degraded to the last degree. The shining surface of the

classic world of antiquity, covering and hiding from poetic eyes the rottenness underneath, is like the glow upon decayed wood and the phosphorescence of dead men's bones.

Second, aside from considerations of morality and the happiness of the masses, in regard even to artistic excellence the Christian era has not been inferior to pagan antiquity. In poetry, painting, sculpture, and architecture we are superior, if anything, to the ancients. Shakespeare and Dante vs. Homer and Horace! Raphael vs. Parhasius! Michael Angelo vs. Phidias! The builders of the cathedral of Rheims vs. the builders of the temple of Diana!—surely, the Christian artists do not lose by comparison with the pagan. Of course in science and music there is no place for comparison. Neither is there in the material comforts and conveniences of life. And Democracy, conceived and developed under the inspiration of Christianity, despite its defects stands out in glaring contrast to the autocracy of old.

Third, in the field of religion! It is a platitude to say that, with the sublime and sweet doctrines of Christianity, in particu-

lar with the divine fairy tale of God becoming Man, there is nothing in the hard, despairing, God-forsaken days of paganism to compare.

Fourth, the practical fruits of the Incarnation have been the elevation of womanhood, the dignifying of the child, the creation of home, the purification of worship, the mitigation of the horrors of war, the freeing of slaves, the more equal distribution of property;—resplendent things which alone prove Christianity divine.

Lastly, the tree of Calvary has not cast a shadow across the world. The tree of Eden had done that from the beginning. The bulk of the pagans were not conscious of the shadow; they were blind to the universal fact of sin. And they suffered from their ignorance of it. For the knowledge of the existence of evil must be the first step taken to surmount evil. Christ taught us to look at the dark tree of Eden and then to see its shadow turned to brightness by effulgence from the radiant tree of Calvary. Decadent poets, with an eye for half-truths, who know Christ's teaching on sin, but not His lesson of redemption from sin, naturally think that the conquering Galilean is pale

with the pallor of pessimism and that the breath of His doctrine has gloomed the earth.

There are two obstacles to a religion of activity and cheer: worldliness and unappreciativeness.

The worldly man is active enough, but he is destitute of cheer. He uses things with titanic zest; but, for himself, not for God. Observe the whirl of commerce, the hum of industry, the rush in offices and stores, the pursuit of money, the indulgence in amusements, the devotion to arts and sciences; and consider how few of such efforts are directed to God; how many of them centre in self. Now worldliness is wrong. It is a perversion of the right order of things. God does and must require that man should use the world for the divine glory and final human beatitude. He cannot give man permission to employ it for selfish purposes. For this reason, since order is the mother of joy, and disorder the parent of unhappiness, the worldling, despite his activity, possessions, pleasures, and spurious gladness, is not a genuinely cheerful man. History is the story of nations made miserable, and sinking through sin

into ruin, on account of the misuse of earthly blessings intended by God for the cheer of men who would employ them aright.

The second obstacle to activity and cheer is unappreciativeness. Every man, even the least fortunate, is overwhelmed with blessings. But they do not profit by them because they do not think of nor esteem them. For instance, who thinks of thanking God for his being, for the vital energies of his body and soul, for the five senses of his flesh, his eyes, ears, nostrils, taste, and touch; for his health, his home, his parents; for his family; for the necessities, comforts, and luxuries of life; for his food, for his roof, for his hearth, for his bed; for the sun, for light, for air, for rain and snow; for fields, hills, rivers, and seas; for trees, flowers, and fruits; for the glory of color, the witchery of music, the delight of fragrances, the soothing of taste. Who thanks God for his intellect, free will, memory, imagination, gift of speech, and power of motion; for his education, books and friendships; for the truth, goodness, and beauty of the world; for the commercial and industrial activities around him; for the arts and sciences; for being under and made a partaker of our free

Government? Who thanks God *for God;* —for the Incarnation; for Christ's passion and death, for the Church, for Mary, for Mass, the Sacraments; for the Eucharist, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the consolations of God and the hope of Heaven? Who indeed? Multitudes of men, because they never think of these blessings, are gloomy and passive in life. They ought to think of and esteem them. For these are the better things of life. Most of us have not the intuition to see the uncommon beauty of these common things. The great poets are great chiefly because, instead of going to the ends of the world for the exotic and unusual, they took their stand in the midst of the everyday world and saw the extraordinary vision of ordinary nature and humanity. And in proportion as we follow the example of the poets we shall become great in the spiritual life, growing in activity and cheer.

Cheerful activity in the world in God's service will grow into the love of God, of self and of our fellowmen if we meditate on the fact that the cause of the world is not the blind and necessary cause of the Materialists, but a personal God, freely dispensing blessings innumerable among men, and even

working in the world for the well-being and delight of His children.

Consider then how, just as a stage manager arranges his scenery for the delight of his audience, just as a father might set a monstrous machine in motion to please his child, just as God in the beginning placed Adam and Eve in the Garden, surrounding them with everything agreeable because He loved them; so your heavenly Father sets the machinery of the Universe in motion for you, His individual child. He makes the sun rise and shine for you; he draws golden stalks of grain out of the earth; He covers the ground with a carpet of green, enamelled with flowers; He makes the ocean heave, and rivers flow and lakes shine; He curves the rainbow and floods the western sky with color at the close of day; He forms the groups of brute-beasts, many and varied; He peoples the earth with men, builds cities, organizes governments, inaugurates the avocations of life and the professions of men. He does all this for you, His child! For behind the world is God directing its activities,—for you. This truth is calculated to arouse in your heart sentiments of the tenderest gratitude, love, and trust. St.

Francis of Assisi, the poet-saint, used to shed tears of joy over his crusts when he reflected that for his personal comfort, God, the Great Workman, planted the grain, fashioned the honey-colored stalks of wheat, gathered them into barns, changed the gold into snow, baked the white flour and placed the bread before him,—Francis! "Oh," he thought, "the tenderness, condescension, and fatherly solicitude of God!"

This truth begets also a proper love and esteem of self; a sublime egotism and self-complacency. We are told to be humble. But we must also be proud. The dignity of man, the king of creation, "the glory of the world and paragon of animals" is proverbial. Three years ago, while I was standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon, a man said to me: "Do you not feel like nothing in the presence of this vastness and antiquity?" My heart did not respond to that humble sentiment; for it was expanding at the time with the proud and exhilarating thought, the divinely-conceited thought, that God, my Father, had, perhaps through millions of years, dug this big, rainbow-colored hole in the ground for *me!* Look out into the light—years of space, and tell me, why

should a man feel little? Why should he not feel great, because God, his Father, has tossed worlds out into the limitless expanses of night, like mammoth toys, for the delight of His child?

Finally, this truth evokes in us the love of our fellowmen. For the profuse generosity of God to me will naturally incline me to be generous to men. God gives, and I almost unconsciously will learn from Him the art of giving. I will reflect that His gifts must not be idle in my hands. I may enjoy them; but also I must use them for Him, for myself and my neighbor.

God, in His Divine Nature gives in the physical world. But also, in His Human Nature, God, Christ, gave in the moral world. And so I have also the example of His generous Humanity. He gave Himself even unto death for men. Should you and I be satisfied with wishing to give less for them? Here then, we have a motive of fraternal charity;—*i. e.,* the generosity of God *as God* and *as Man,* to us. If charity prevails, if giving instead of taking becomes the rule of life, peace will dawn upon the world,—the peace of the Prince of Peace. Then God will be glad, I will be glad, my

neighbor will be glad; and the consummation of it all will be Heaven, the place of rapture, where there will be no more weeping; where God will wipe away all tears from our eyes; —the true life of everlasting activity and cheer.

II

PASSIVITY AND PAIN

"And it was the Parasceve of the Pasch, the sixth hour, and he saith to the Jews: Behold your King. But they cried: Away with Him, away with Him; crucify Him. Pilate saith to them: Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered: We have no king but Caesar. Then therefore he delivered Him to them to be crucified. And they took Jesus and led Him forth. And bearing His own cross, He went forth to that place which is called Calvary, but in Hebrew Golgatha. And as they led Him away they laid hold of one Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country; and they laid the cross on him to carry after Jesus. And there followed Him a great multitude of people, and of women, who bewailed and lamented Him. But Jesus turning to them, said: Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves and your children."

According to tradition Jesus fell three times on His way to Calvary, His blessed Mother met Him and tried to console Him, and Veronica, the brave woman, offered Him a cloth of cleansing, upon which He imprinted an image of His dolorous face.

Here we have in brief the story of the way to Calvary; the story of the saddest path ever trod in the history of the world. The lesson of that story is a simple one, but a grand one,—the lesson of the mystery of suffering in life. The human race has carried its cross up to the present day from the time that Adam and Eve carried theirs through the golden gate of Eden forth into the bleak sterility of the outer world.

Wherefore the cross? Why Calvary? Why this valley of tears? Why so much sorrow and suffering for the children of men? Moments of bliss are few and brief; lamentation is prolonged. Why is the heart of man, made for happiness and craving joy, so seldom thrilled by it? Nature is glad. Why is man sad? The sky, the earth, oceans and streams are resplendent. Why is man, the master of it all, cast down? This question has been asked from time immemorial. Answers have been given to it,

—some blasphemous, some halting, others half-answers. Let us try to answer it in the light of reason, experience, observation, and Christianity.

As a prelude to the answer I shall give, let me state one big, consoling fact. Eden has been lost; but amid the general ruin of the race there is one thing that has *not* been lost (with that saved, the best has been saved), and that is love. The whole of literature, sacred and profane, asserts loudly, proudly, triumphantly, even defiantly, the fact and the omnipotence of love. Let a church be as dark as a tomb, what matters it provided the red, glowing sanctuary lamp be still alive! Let the temple of the world be enveloped in the black night of sadness; what matters it, provided the red-hearted flame of love still glows in the sanctuary of the breast of man! Also may I add that life is not all sorrow and suffering; nothing will be gained by picturing life darker than it is.

Again, before giving the explanation of sorrow in life, let me state what is *not* the explanation of it. A *malignant God* is not the explanation of it. God does not cause and then gloat over the miseries of men.

God is not behind the world, leering and laughing at its travail. He is not the Manichean Evil Genius, to whom the joys of men are an abomination and their anguish is a delight. Numbers of men during the late war were tempted to look at God in that light. God is holy and just but He is not cruel, nor is He even indifferent to the woes of humanity. On the contrary, He is most compassionate. One of the tenderest pictures of Holy Writ is that of our Saviour seated upon a hill overlooking Jerusalem, weeping over the city of His love. "If thou hadst known," He says to her, "if thou hadst known the things that are unto thy peace; but thou wouldst not!" He sympathized with Jerusalem in her sorrows; He sympathized with the sorrowing world; He became a man, the Man of Sorrows, in order that He might participate in our dolorous experiences on earth even unto the cross. How unappealing to our imagination would be a God of gladness in a stricken world! How irresistible a God of grief among grieving men! God knew the charm of likeness in suffering; and so He became the sad Saviour that he might win our hearts and banish forever from our minds

the idea that He is callous to or jubilant over the pangs of humanity.

What then is the cause of the sorrows of life? A just and good God sends us pain, permits others to cause it to us, and allows us to draw pain upon ourselves, because the endurance of pain is necessary for the glory of God, for our own salvation and that of other men.

God sends us pain directly, without the mediation of men. Earthquakes, volcanoes, storms, floods; some cases of natal defects of body and mind; "hard luck," as it is called, namely failure in spite of natural ability, industry, judgment, and favorable conditions, are examples of evils which God sends us directly.

Other men cause us pain. Through jealousy, ambition, lust, and avarice some people make other people suffer. God permits this; but He does not cause it, nor is He responsible for it. Men are responsible for their deeds. For they are not dancing puppets, and God is not a master-showman pulling the strings.

We draw pain upon ourselves One loses friends through discourtesy; another fails in business through recklessness of inef-

ficiency; another becomes poor through lavish expenditure.

Moreover, we have two faculties,—imagination and memory,—which cause us endless suffering. By imagination we perversely look into the future and conjure up a host of direful possibilities; by memory we resuscitate baneful ghosts of the past; we frighten ourselves with this double nightmare, and exclaim: "How hard God makes our life!" God is not to blame, but we ourselves. Let the future take care of itself; let "the dead past bury its dead." Moreover, nine-tenths of our fearful anticipations will never be actualized. Those that will occur, we shall have strength to meet when they eventuate, though we cannot face them now.

The threefold purpose of pain is to save us from falling into sin; to restore us to grace if we have sinned; and after restoration, to confirm us in a virtuous life; and this threefold purpose will be understood if we ponder the following three groups of facts: First, the world, human nature, and Original Sin; second, personal sin and its implications; and third, the practice of virtue.

The world has two characteristics: it is *useful* and *pleasant*. It is useful because it helps us to attain to our last end. It is pleasant because it flatters our senses and appeals to the passions of our heart. To use the world because it is useful is right. To use it because it is pleasant is wrong.

Now we have two groups of faculties; namely, our intellect and will; and our senses and passions. Our intellect sees the *useful* and our will can and ought to choose it. Our senses perceive the *pleasant* and our passions spontaneously desire it.

The *useful* is better than the *pleasant*. But because our intellect represents the *useful* to us in a cold, abstract, impersonal way, whereas our senses present the *pleasant* to us in a concrete, glowing, most attractive way,—therefore the *pleasant seems* to be better than the *useful*. Hence, since we incline to what appears better to us, our habitual disposition will be to regard the world rather as a means of self-gratification than as a means of aiding us in our progress toward God.

That the majority of men act according to this evil disposition of human nature is a truism. For, it is evident from observa-

tion and experience that few men can be rich without luxury, successful without conceit, learned without pride, good-looking without vanity, honored without ostentation, comfortable without sloth, pleasure-loving without impurity; few possess the world without misusing it.

Accordingly, God, who wishes to save men from sin, withholds from the majority of them objects of pleasure and honor which would occasion their spiritual ruin. Sickness, poverty, failure, worriment, and other forms of passivity and pain are the portion of the majority because the majority would lose their souls if they were placed in a felicitous environment. The more fortunate minority can avoid evil only by keeping their hearts detached in spirit from blessings which they may choose to retain in reality.

Christ taught that the poor, the meek, the persecuted, and the humble in spirit are blessed. He encouraged the rich young man to sell all he had and to follow Him. He said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me." Best of all, He divorced Himself from the world and wedded Himself to

unworldliness, choosing the crib and the cross, to show us that generally the possession of worldly blessings leads to sin whereas abstention from them, in so far as this is possible, is the safe way to God.

God is not responsible for the excessive pull of the *pleasant* on the senses and passions of the heart. The responsibility rests with man;—the first man. For, in the beginning God gave the parents of the human race a special preternatural gift of appreciating the *useful* at its real value and relegating the *pleasant* to its proper place. That gift was forfeited by the sin of Adam and was not restored to us by Christ. It would be unfair to accuse God of purposely making the heart prone to evil and life hard. Original Sin is responsible for that. If Adam had not fallen, the human heart would not be unduly attracted by the pleasantness of the world, but life in Eden would be all activity and cheer. Now, however, to counteract the worldly predilections of the heart, life must be, in part, a system of passivity and pain.

The second fact which shows the purpose of pain is personal sin. The purpose of

pain, founded on personal sin, is threefold: atonement, sanction, and correction.

If a law has been broken, justice requires that it should be restored; restored by him who broke it, either vicariously or in person; and restored by the endurance of pain. Every restoration involves pain. Throw a joint out of its socket! You must suffer to have it reset. Also, opposites counteract each other. Cold destroys heat. Heat destroys cold. Sinful pleasure and virtuous pain are opposites. Therefore, the pleasure of breaking God's law is counteracted by the pain of atoning for the infraction. Moreover, in justice there must be an equalizing of unpleasantness. The unpleasantness to God is sin; the unpleasantness to us is atonement for sin. God was hurt by our offences; we must submit to being hurt by His punishments. On the cross Christ atoned vicariously for humanity; and it is not right that we sinful men should allow the sinless Christ to carry the whole burden of God's wrath.

Evidently, therefore, the complaint that God is cruel has no weight. He is just. He does not like to see men suffer; but He

does like to see the moral order, perturbed by sin, restored; and since the only just means of restoration is suffering, He likes to see it restored by suffering. He wishes to see His law sanctioned, and since often the only means of sanctioning it is pain, He wishes to see it sanctioned by pain. A surgeon does not rejoice in the pain of his patient, but in his health restored through pain. The State does not take pleasure in punishing evil-doers; but, in the law's vindication through their punishment.

"But God is merciful! Why does He not remit the punishment in His Mercy instead of inflicting it in justice?"

The principal part of God's economy in dealing with sinners has been one of mercy. The Incarnation, our deliverance from hell, the choice He gives us of enduring lighter sufferings on earth to escape the far worse punishment of purgatory; the Providential preservation of men from a multitude of direful possibilities, *e. g.,* sickness, disgrace, accidents, failure in business and sudden death, which their sins deserve; these are the works of His Mercy. Also God's Justice is as admirable as His Mercy; fear of a just God is quite as noble a virtue as grat-

itude to a merciful God; and the endurance of pain is as healthful as the environment of pleasure.

"But why do the innocent suffer?" Are the best of us innocent? The more innocent see that they have much to atone for. The less innocent are partial to their sins. But even if we were wholly innocent, could not God use us as victims of atonement for the sins of other men? God owns us. As He has a perfect right to take away our life utterly, so also He has a right to burden it with sufferings. As a matter of fact, nothing is more common in holy Scripture than the story of guiltless people atoning by proxy for the sins of the guilty. Think of the sinless Christ on the cross and the Immaculate Mother at the foot of it! A clean oblation is a more acceptable reparation for sin than a spotted one. Hence when sufferings which seem undeserved come upon you, remember the dignity of hanging on your cross at Christ's side on Calvary in atonement for the sins of your brethren in Purgatory and on earth.

The purpose of atonement then, is to restore the law. The purpose of sanction is to keep the law intact.

"Sanction" signifies an adequate means of inducing free men to keep the law. A law without sanction is no law; it is only an empty ordinance. It is clear that God's law must have a sanction. The goodness of God, the amiability of Christ, the beauty of virtue, the reasonableness of the law, reward for keeping it, the odiousness of sin and its punishment are various sanctions of God's law.

If God never enforced the sanction of the law, if in His Mercy He always remitted the punishment due to sin, His law would be as badly off as it would be without any sanction at all. For men could and would say: "God's law has a sanction, but the sanction is never enforced."

But men sin. Therefore God must punish them some times. In some cases, He does so in the next life; in other cases, in this. When we suffer in punishment of our sins, we ought to pay the penalty of the law in the spirit of good sportsmanship; besides thanking the merciful God for giving us the privilege of enduring pains of earth in place of the incomparably severer sufferings of the hereafter.

Suffering is also a corrective for the sin-

ner. This purpose of pain and its success is a commonplace in the spiritual life. God loved the people of Israel. They went astray over and over again, and over and over again he made them suffer, and they returned to Him. Possibly we know by personal experience the sobering influence of misfortune. Sometimes indeed it hardens a sinner in his ways; but more frequently it reforms him. When the world smiles, he is ravished by its blandishments into a callousness toward God. But when the world frowns on him, with his earthly house of honor, wealth, social standing and success collapsing and tumbling about his head, then it is that, numbed by the shock of ruin, he looks up and sees the sweet blue of heaven. The Thief had to be held by the cruel arms of a cross before he submitted to God's arms. The Prodigal had to consort with swine and feed on husks before he thought of returning to his father's house, and the woman taken in sin had actually to be dragged to the feet of her Saviour by the hard Scribes and Pharisees.

The third cause of pain is the practice of virtue and therefore (after the restoration and vindication of the law and the sin-

ner's conversion) the third purpose of pain is to confirm the penitent in his new life of grace. For virtue includes strength, beauty, sympathy with our fellow-men, and likeness to Christ;—four qualities which are unattainable without pain.

Virtue is a synonym of strength. Now strength is impossible without hardship and suffering. St. Paul, speaking of preparation for the game of salvation, draws his comparison from the austere training of the Olympic athletes. We know by observation to what curtailment of comforts football players submit that they may be hard for the conflict. During the war the physical tests to which the soldiers were subjected in camps were so severe that it was a relief for them to go to the front and face the actualities of war. The same relationship between hardship and strength exists in the spiritual life. If a man enjoys himself amid comforts and luxuries, the muscles of his soul are sure to sag. But if he is put through trial of body or soul, his spirit will expand and solidify. God sends us pain of body and soul because he wishes us to be athletes and soldiers worthy of the name.

And tell me, is there anything more beau-

tifying than suffering? Enjoyment arrays us in a superficial attractiveness; but suffering steeps the soul in beauty. Indulgence hardens men; distress refines them. Pleasure panders to selfishness; misfortune awakens generosity. If Adam and Eve had remained in Eden, and we with them, life would be a gratifying experience. But it would lack the mysterious charm of a tragedy. And who would choose a life of unbroken ease at the cost of never experiencing the bitter-sweet of suffering? The first Adam and the first Eve appeal to us more poignantly weeping outside the gates than smiling within. And the second Adam and the second Eve, in the shadow of Calvary, He in the crimson garment of His blood, and she in the blue mantle of her woes, mean more to us than they do in the effulgence of Easter morning. Christ said: "When I shall be lifted up, I shall draw all things to Me." He has done so because the pathetic beauty of His sufferings has magnetized the suffering sons and daughters of men. His Church has been more lovely in the days of her martyrdom than in the days of her success. Secular history casts a spell on humanity because at its best it is a gallery

of portraits of men and women glorified by anguish. The heroic women of history under the burden of irremediable misfortune, but unconquerable; the heroic men of history, strained by the pressure of heaped-up adversities, but undaunted, stop even the casual passer-by on the road of life with the pathetic magnificence of their fire-cleansed souls. The great authors of tragic literature rely for their compelling power on the beauty of their heroes and heroines in the shadow of death. For heroes and heroines are not made out of the sunshine of joyousness, but out of the ebon blackness of woe. We ought to encourage ourselves with the thought that suffering, well borne, invests us with a grace, a charm, a robust gentleness of soul which nothing else can confer.

The love of God and the love of man are the perfection of the Law. Fraternal love assumes two forms: felicitation for a brother in success: sympathy for him in distress. Since distress is more general in life than success, the more common form of charity is sympathy. Sympathy is a beautiful thing: but it is bought at a price, and the price of sympathy is personal pain. For

no one that has not sorrowed himself can compassionate the sorrowing. No one that has not felt the bitter sting of disappointment can raise a disappointed brother to his feet. No one that has enjoyed health all his life can with fitting sympathy smooth the pillow of the sick. No one that has not wept can dry the tears of the grieving. No one that has not drained the chalice of interior desolation to the dregs can appreciate the meaning of that prayer rising daily from Christian souls: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" and "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me." Oh, when all goes well with us, we forget the needy, but when our own hearts are broken, they open to the tragedy and pathos of humanity.

Finally, pain makes us like Christ crucified, and the endurance of it is a test of our love of Him. One who loves another wishes to be like him. This mysterious feature of love is recognized, understood, and praised when there is question of human love. A mother wishes to suffer the pain of death with her dying child, although her sufferings will not alleviate those of the child. But to the generality, wishing to

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suffer simply and solely because Christ suffered seems absurd. But a choice few have understood. For instance, St. Teresa cried: "Either let me suffer or let me die." And the common attitude of the saints has been that if they could save their souls as well by going along a rosy way to Heaven, they would choose the thorny path because that was the way elected by Christ, whom they love. And how explain the infinite patience of the myriad poor and sick of the world? Worldlings wonder why they do not commit suicide. But they are patient and even happy because the cross and Calvary are before them. Standing at the foot of the cross in spirit, you perhaps have often wished that you had stood there in reality. Is this true devotion or sentimental piety? Answer that question by asking another! How do you act now? For if now you decline to bear the pains of your life, what assurance can you have that you would have stayed with Christ on Calvary? But if you try to be patient in affliction, you can take the consolation to your heart that you would have kept company with Christ, Mary, Magdalen, and John on the hill of austere sublimity.

In the light of these three causes of suffering,—first, the world, human nature and Original Sin; second, personal sin, atonement for it, sanction of the law and correction of the sinner; and third, the four factors of virtue which we have just rehearsed,—we can understand why life is not only an economy of activity and cheer, but also a system of passivity and pain; why we are to refuse the world as well as to use it; why we must endure the disagreeable as well as enjoy the pleasant; why we must whip the passions into subjection as well as gratify them; why, in a word, life has a negative as well as a positive side.

St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, referred to this ambidextrous, versatile requirement of life when he declared: "Whether through glory or disgrace, through praise or blame, through fame or obscurity, through life or death, through joy or grief, through poverty or wealth, let us drive on towards God our last end."

But if all these motives are not potent enough to induce you to accept a life of passivity and pain, consider that you *must* accept it, whether you wish to or not. The cross is a physical necessity; you simply

cannot get away from it. Why not make a virtue of necessity and carry it with a grace? Why not "grin and bear it"? Moreover, the endurance of pain is a necessary condition for the enjoyment of pleasure. Only one who has suffered from hunger enjoys food. Only one who has been sick appreciates health. It is a queer but true law of nature that uninterrupted pleasantness becomes unpleasant, and a life of unbroken ease grow monotonous and drab. The piquancy of life lies in the contrasting experience of hardship and ease, failure and success, sorrow and joy.

Christ will help you to bear your cross. "Behold," He says, "I am with you all days even unto the consummation of the world." "Come to me all ye who labor and are heavily burdened and I will refresh you." "I will help you in all your undertakings and comfort you in all your sorrows." Also, "My yoke is sweet and my burden light." This is so because Christ is your helper. Realize that He is in the world today, the same Christ who comforted the multitude nearly twenty centuries ago. He said, "I have compassion on the multitude." He is the Man of Sorrows who loves the

sorrowing. His Sacred Heart pities the unfortunate and enriches them with fortifying grace. He is with you ready and anxious to lighten your load. Be sure not to reject His proffered aid.

His aid sometimes takes the form of spiritual consolations which refresh us with such keen relish that the whole world would well be lost in exchange for such a heavenly gift. If you try to bear hardship for the love of Christ, you may hope for the exquisite visitations of the Lord.

Better still! "The Lord chastises those whom He loves." One of the surest signs of His favor is suffering; and what greater happiness is there than the joy of being assured of God's friendship? It is common for us to imagine that when fortune smiles on us, God does so, too; when fortune frowns, God frowns. Let us undeceive ourselves. God is nearest to us when he seems farthest away. When we are in the depths, He is at our side. Oh you dear victims of mischance, poor, sick, obscure, suffering in body, distressed in mind, overlooked or even looked down on by the world, be not cast down any more, but raise your hearts, expand your minds, look up and laugh; for

in your cross you have the assurance of being beloved by God and His Christ!

And then take comfort from the thought of companions in distress. Gaze across the earth and see multitudes like yourself. One of the worst features of our cross is that we think we are carrying it alone. We are not alone! Many seem to be happy, but are not. Others have the goods of earth but also hidden distresses. Others again, who are in an earthly Eden now, have had their bad days or will have them. God help the man or woman who neither has had, nor has, nor will have, a cross to bear! How can they survive the storms of life without strength, and how can they have strength without suffering? The world is in the same boat with you, so take comfort from your company.

And life is not long. As the crucifixion had its end for Christ, so it will have for you. Then after life, Heaven, where God Himself will wipe away all tears from your eyes; where there will be no more weeping, nor crying; for the former things will have passed away; wealth and poverty, success and failure, glory and obscurity, health and

sickness, smiles and tears, pleasure and pain alike. Think of that day when relief will come to you at home in your Father's house.

If you take these truths to heart and practice them, the mystery of suffering and sorrow in life will not be altogether insoluble, God will not seem to be a cruel Master, and pessimism and despair will not catch at your heart. On the contrary, you will become humble, patient, reconciled, strong, active, and even glad.

But the necessary condition for this happy consummation is the old, old battle against self. The "Agere contra," "vincere se ipsum" of the saints must be your rule of life. Let us wage the battle against self! It is a difficult battle because it is waged in secret, in the heart, without spectators, banners, and martial music. It is difficult because it is waged against our attractive self, not against a repulsive enemy. It is difficult because it is not a battle of action, but one of endurance. It is difficult because the victory and crown are not for this life, for the conflict ends only with death. It is difficult because the generality of men regard it as a quixotic and unnatural conflict.

But it is exhilarating because as we have tried to explain, it is possible, with God's grace easy, it is physically and morally necessary, useful, noble, elevating, productive of peace; it glorifies God and leads us to eternal joy.

Let us fight this battle of self-conquest to the end! With head erect, with eyes aflame, with lips tight, with jaws set, with shoulders back, with sinews tense, let us fight the battle of self-conquest to the end! Let us rise superior to crushed feeling! Let us be masters of our soul! Let us keep our head above the clouds which envelop all else? Possibly we have lost everything:—fortune, comforts, friends. But let us hold fast to our manhood, our womanhood (the one thing worth holding to) and exult!

Christ goes before you along the royal road of the cross: follow Him royally! He falls thrice: be not surprised if you fall under the weight of your cross! His Mother comforts Him with her sympathy: do you comfort Him by suffering with Him! The women of Jerusalem follow Him with lamentations and tears: go you and do likewise! Veronica gives Him a kerchief upon

which He imprints a crimson image of His dolorous face: let His spirit be imprinted on your soul! Simon of Cyrene assists Him with His cross: be you another Simon of Cyrene!

III

SIN

After the first two sermons on the positive and the negative side of life, in which it was shown that life contains three elements, God, the World and Myself;—*God,* my First Beginning and Last End, whom I am morally obliged to glorify and in whom alone I can find perfect happiness; *the World,* (the assembly of all things, not including God and myself), which I am to use in part, and in part reject in accordance with God's will in the matter; *Myself, i e.,* first, my passions which long for pleasant things and shrink from disagreeable things without any regard for their utility or harmfulness; and second my free will, which, under the guidance of my intellect, ought to choose the useful and reject the harmful, whether they be attractive or repulsive;—after these two sermons on the positive and negative side of life, a reasonable man, I imagine, would say to

himself: "Yes, this is the only right view of life; and therefore I shall rule my passions, use or refuse the world according to the dictate of reason, and thus attain to my last end and save my soul."

But there is one question which possibly has not entered into such a man's consideration, namely: "Am I now facing towards God?"

If he is not, he must first turn round toward God (if that is possible).

And so we naturally run upon the subject of sin; for sin is an aversion from God.

Is sin a fact; a terrible fact, deserving a terrible punishment, or not? And is it possible to rise from sin? If so, which are the means?

A certain type of rationalists say: "There is no such thing as sin. According to the poet: 'There's nothing good or bad in life, but thinking makes it so.' It is all a matter of personal view. 'All is pure to the pure.' How can it be sinful to use God's good creatures and to indulge the passions which He gave us for use? The idea of sin was originated by priests and politicians as a means of keeping the people under restraint for their own selfish ends. We

know how things that were formerly considered bad by the Church, are looked on as legitimate now; for example, usury and dancing. And so some day, when we shall have evolved out of the gloomy period of prohibitions, we shall be free to do as we list in a sunshiny, laughing world. Moreover, granting, for the sake of argument, that some things are good and some bad, yet a man cannot be held responsible for evil, because he is not free. Environment and heredity determine the character of his actions with machine-like precision." So spoke Clarence Darrow in his defense of Leopold and Loeb. Man may think he is free, but in reality he is not. Fate, Destiny is the ruler of the world. Hamlet says: "There's a Divinity which shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we may." Man is the toy of the gods. From the beginning of the world his story is written in the stars.

In opposition to this rationalistic view of sin I hold that sin is a fact the most tremendous of evil things for which man is responsible and from which he can rise by the grace of God.

The whole Christian people have believed in sin for nearly two thousand years. The

Church during all that time has been spending her best energies in emphasizing the fact of sin, and in trying to save men from it. Her dogmatic teaching, her popular preaching, her legislation, her prohibitions and commands, her Sacraments, her devotions, her ritual and ceremonial are all founded on her conviction of the fact and awfulness of sin.

She learned her lesson from Christ. The Incarnation is the economy of salvation from sin. Christ, who for love of us submitted to everything else, would not submit to sin. "Who shall convict Me of sin?" The most harrowing words ever spoken were directed against the sinful Scribes and Pharisees: "Whited sepulchres full of dead men's bones." He threatened hell-fire to those who offend against fraternal charity and do not repent. He would have nothing to do with the world of wealth, honor, and comforts because it leads to evil. He said: "Fear not those who can destroy the body, but rather fear ye Him who can destroy both body and soul into Hell" (on account of sin); and, "What doth it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul" (through sin).

Christ's teaching was only a repetition of the teaching of the Old Testament. God punished the wrong-doing of His people with the Flood, the Egyptian and Babylonian captivity. He issued His Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai; and His prophets from century to century raised their voices in denunciation of sin which they declared to be the worst of all evils.

Here are authorities who, on account of their dignity, wisdom, and truthfulness, numbers and antiquity, constant uniformity of teaching, and the blinding evidence on which their teaching is founded, ought to convince us that sin is not merely an idea, a fancy, a superstition, a fabrication of priests and prophets, or a nightmare of scrupulous, overwrought minds, but a fact, the most odious fact of life.

What is the evidence against sin?

It is supernatural, drawn from Revelation and natural, drawn from reason.

The supernatural evidence may be summed up under five heads: The punishment of the Angels, the punishment of our first parents, the atonement of Christ on the cross, the unrequited goodness of a crucified God, and the contrast between the

ugliness of sin and the beauty of the sinless Christ.

"I saw Satan falling like lightning from Heaven." These words of Our Saviour are a graphic description of the punishment inflicted on Lucifer for the first wrong. I see in imagination Almighty God on His throne, flashing lightnings and hurling thunderbolts after the falling Morning Star and his myrmidons, while Michael leads the loyal Angels in pursuit of the rebels down to the fiery lake of hell.

Seraphs, Cherubim, Powers, Potentates, Virtues, Thrones, Principalities, Angels and Archangels, nine choirs of beauty, wisdom and energy, had been created by God. They were to enjoy bliss eternal if loyal; suffer eternal damnation if perfidious. Satan with a third of Heaven said: "I will not serve." And forthwith they were driven from the empyrean.

From the beginning of the world up to the present day they have been consumed in fire; until the day of doom they will burn; and from then on, forever.

But what is worse, their intellects and wills are perverted. The beautiful, sweet, good, and true they abominate with diabol-

ical animosity. There is nothing admirable in them; they are the opposite of everything lovable. Hence Milton's "Paradise Lost" has done much harm by presenting Lucifer in heroic proportions. Worst of all, the lost Angels will be deprived of God and all images of God eternally.

All this I take to be true, because it is supported by the authority of the Four Gòspels.

Now a just God cannot punish sin beyond its deserts. But it is evident from reason and Revelation that God is infinitely just. Therefore, the punishment meted out to the Angels was not in excess of their disobedience. But that punishment is beyond description. Therefore, their disobedience must have been an unspeakable enormity.

I see another tragic picture of titanic proportions: A sinning man and woman, hanging their heads, driven from Eden by a flaming Seraph into the desolate stretches of the outer world. And as they stand outside the gate, God gives them a vision of the effects of their disobedience. They look out into the unborn centuries and see

tens of billions of their children, working in the sweat of their brow, sorrowing, suffering, dying. They see countless eyes filled with tears, and broken hearts. They hear the cries of the desolate. They visualize hosts of their children consumed by the passions of lust, hatred, ambition, pride, jealousy, intemperance, indulging themselves in a million ways. They behold Cain killing Abel, the abominations which drew on the Flood, the infidelities of Israel and its Deicide; the grossness and cruelties of Babylon, Egypt, Assyria, Rome, and Greece, the soddenness of outlying barbarians and savages, the excesses of Christian nations, the World War. Worst of all, they behold the eternal loss of their progeny on account of their parents' sin under the tree;—a loss prevented only by the coming of Christ.

Now this vision was not a mere dream, but the expression of a fact to be. For Original Sin with all these dire results is one of the fundamental teachings of Holy Writ.

Again I say: A just God cannot punish sin beyond its deserts. But it is evident from reason and Revelation that God is infinitely just. Therefore, the punishment

meted out to our first parents was not in excess of their sin. But that punishment staggers the imagination with its awfulness. Therefore, their sin must have been the quintessence of evil.

The third vision is the Son of God atoning for sin during His Passion and Death. In the garden of Olives He cried: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me." But the chalice of anguish did not pass from Him, because if it had, sinners would drink forever from the bitter cups of hell. He was condemned by four judges, that we might not hear the harrowing sentence of the eternal Judge. He was scourged and crowned with thorns, to save us from the lashes of demons and a crown of burning coals. He said: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." And the Father forgave for His sake. He said: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Had He not been forsaken by God on Calvary, we should be forsaken by God forever. He said: "It is consummated." My work is done. By My death I have saved the world. He died on His cross, that you and I might not hang eternally on our cross on a Calvary of hell,

pierced with flaming nails, and mocked by demons who would scream up at us: "Hang there on thy cross of fire so long as God is God." The Prophet truly said of Him: "He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins, and by His bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord hath placed on Him the iniquity of us all." Now, since the enormity of sin is measured by the atonement required for it by a just God, judge in the light of Christ's Passion and death, how horrible a thing sin is.

But the Cross shows also the ingratitude of sin. On Good Friday morning the Church represents Christ saying to His people from the Cross: "O My people, what have I done to thee, or in what have I offended thee; answer Me! Because I led thee out of the land of Egypt, thou hast prepared a cross for thy Saviour. Because I led thee through the desert for forty years, and fed thee on manna, and brought thee into the Promised Land, thou hast prepared a cross for thy Saviour. What could I have done for thee that I did not do? I gave thee to drink of the rock, and thou hast given Me gall to drink. I struck the

kings of Canaan for thee, and thou hast struck my head with a reed. I gave thee a royal sceptre, and thou hast placed on My head a crown of thorns. I raised thee to glory and power, and thou hast raised Me to the cross." The ingratitude of the Jews was a foreshadowing of Christians who are indifferent to the pathos and generosity of their crucified God. He hangs on the Cross, and we sin at the foot of it. He weeps; we laugh. He is crowned with thorns; we with flowers. He thirsts; we eat and drink to excess. His body is torn with lashes and nails; ours are pampered with luxuries. His body is stripped; ours are adorned with resplendent garments. His heart is broken; ours expand with the exhilaration of sin. He is disgraced before the world; we seek and enjoy its flatteries. He dies; we think only of enjoying life. He endures all this lovingly to redeem us from our sins; we sin on. He delivers us from the Egypt of sin and leads us to the Promised Land of grace; we, instead of thanking Him, crucify Him anew by our sins. Oh, the lovableness of Him; and the hardheartedness of us! Can we endure any longer the contrast between His ten-

derness and pathos and our ingratitude? Let us love Him at last, become captives of Calvary, and leave our sins.

If I contrast the beauty of Christ's life with the vices of mine, I have another means of estimating the evil of sin. Let me, then, contrast His love of all men, with my mean and constricted love of myself; His poverty at Bethlehem and at Nazareth with my adoration of money; His austerity with my indulgence; His purity with my lasciviousness; His reverence for God with my rebelliousness; His transparent truthfulness with my deceptions; His sobriety with my drunkenness; His zealous energy with my sloth; His regard for the poor with my aloofness from them; His sympathy for sufferers with my indifference to them; His spirituality with my worldliness; His kind words with my hard and harsh ones; His meek gaze with my angry looks; His humility with my pride. Oh the beauty of His life and the unloveliness of mine!

These, then, are the five sources of supernatural knowledge which we have regarding the odiousness of sin: the punishment of the Angels, the punishment of Adam and Eve, the atonement of Christ, the goodness

of Our Saviour and our thanklessness, the beauty of Christ and our sinful ugliness.

There are also four facts knowable by the unaided light of reason which manifest the repulsiveness of sin: the greatness of God, the goodness of God, the right of God, and the consequences of sin even in this life.

What am I in comparison with the hundreds of millions of men who have lived or are living now? Nothing! In comparison with the Angels, one of whom, according to Scripture, could destroy innumerable men? Nothing! What then am I in comparison with God? A certain cloud of stars, visible to the eye, is one million light-years away from the earth. A light-year is the distance which light travels in one year. Since light covers 186,000 miles a second, it goes six million million miles a year; and this distance is a light-year. Judge, then, the distance of a million light years! We are staggered by the thought of a universe of such extent. Now, out beyond the star-clouds is God. Indeed the vast spaces of the universe are like a cubic inch in comparison with His immensity. At the moment of Creation He tossed whole assemblages of star-worlds into space casually, so to speak,

as a child might blow bubbles from a window. Now the sinner, a speck on the earth, which is an almost invisible trifle in an obscure corner of the universe, stands up,with full knowledge of what he is doing, with full deliberation and consent, and says to God: "I will not serve!" Words cannot express the impudence, the obscene insolence of his revolt.

"But, one may say, "it is inconceivable that Almighty God in the distant heavens should condescend to be gravely offended by an insignificant ant on a tiny ball of earth." To this I answer, first, that God, on account of His Infinite Intelligence, sees an almost invisible atom as clearly as He sees the sun. Secondly, while a sinful action of man is infinitesimal considered *physically,* it is infinite considered *morally.* For since the offensiveness of an act must be measured by the dignity of the person offended, it is evident that a sin against the infinite God is infinite in offensiveness. God sees it in its moral proportions and must regard it with proportionate aversion. He must regard it as an attempt at Deicide. For if God for one instant ceased to be the Lord and Master of anything, He would

cease to be God. But the sinner, preferring his own will to God's, would deprive Him of His Lordship over the human will, would rob Him of His Divinity. It is no wonder, then, that God does and must take cognizance of the sins of men.

If God were only immense and powerful, man's revolt would not be so repulsive as it is. But God is good to man, and so his revolt is also an embodiment of thanklessness. If you have offended Him, you have this truth to face: God makes the sun rise to warm and brighten you day by day; He veils the earth with the darkness of night to lull you to sleep; He provides you with food and drink, clothes you, keeps a roof over your head, sustains your health, varies your life with amusements, gives you an opportunity to work, bestows the arts and sciences on you, cheers you with companionship and enriches you with friends; and at the very moment you are profiting by His fatherly solicitude and generosity, you insult Him, using His very gifts against Him.

His continuous Providence over us is sometimes interpreted by presumptuous sinners as indifference to our offensiveness. It is not that! On account of His Holiness

He tends with an infinite impulse of aversion to thrust the sinner from the face of the earth into hell; and the Angels and forces of nature, His faithful servitors, jealous of His honor and wrathful at us, would wish to punish us;—the Angels would wish to smite us; the sun, to consume us; the waters of the ocean to flow in on us; the earth to swallow us, and wild beasts to tear us. But God freely restrains the impulse of His indignant Holiness, and, checking the vengeful zeal of earth and sea and sky for His honor, makes them serve and please us, because, in spite of our wretched ingratitude, He loves us with a father's, nay, with a mother's tenderness. Can you contrast His love with your thanklessness, and yet not be touched, and yet continue in your evil ways?

Sin is naturally wrong because it is opposed to God's right. Virtue, as we have seen, consists in ruling our passions, using the world aright, glorifying God, and being happy in Him. Sin is the contradiction of all this. For the sinner is ruled by his passions, misuses the world, dishonors God and seeks his happiness outside of Him. Therefore, since God has a right to our virtue,

sin is wrong. In particular idolatry, violating the Sabbath, and taking the Lord's Name in vain, sins directly against God, are wrong.

Moreover, since every man has a fundamental right and grave obligation to serve God and to use the necessary and useful means of doing so, disobedience to parents, neglect of children, murder, detraction and calumny, adultery, theft, and lying are wrong. For these sins involve an interference with some or other man's rightful use of necessary and useful means of salvation. For the obedience of children, the care of parents, life, good name, wife and husband, material goods, and truth are useful and necessary for the salvation of those individuals to whom they pertain.

It is clear, therefore, that the Ten Commandments are not arbitrary prohibitions. On the contrary, they are natural necessities. God was not free to refrain from prohibiting those sins. They are not wrong because He forbids them. Rather, He forbids them because they were already and eternally wrong.

If you need further evidence of the evil

of sin, cast your eyes at its effects even in this life.

Consider, for example, the unspeakable diseases that impurity causes in the body, the insanity, the callousness of mind to all things exquisite, the leering scepticism with regard to the virtuous, the vulgarizing of the sensibilities, the animal attitude towards beauty; consider how impurity blights the innocence of its victims, takes the glow of modesty off the cheek of youth; puts a brazen look into the eyes of girls, spoils marital love, breaks up families, and undermines the State.

Consider how ambition and the love of money brought into the world the monstrosity of war; its broken bodies and broken hearts, the ruin of nations, the destruction of homes, industry, commerce; undying hatreds.

Consider how pride of intellect has introduced rationalism, robbing millions of people of their Christian heritage and making the modern world a place of doubt, pessimism, despair or indifference with regard to the life beyond the grave.

Consider how selfishness inverts the

natural impulse of man to expand and give munificently to others like the sun dispensing light and heat; and changes it into a hateful ambition to centralize all things of value in his little and contemptible self.

Consider how covetousness vulgarizes, drunkenness debauches, sloth stupefies, and lying undermines social intercourse.

Here we have an accumulation of repulsive effects. Since, therefore, one can judge the tree by its fruits, it is undeniable that sin is a horror with which no other evil can compare.

Add to the five arguments from Revelation and the four from reason the universal testimony of mankind.

When all men, in all circumstances and times, hold that a thing is true, it *is* true, provided the three following conditions be verified; namely, that the proposition which they assent to is easy to understand, all-important, and one which they would rather wish to be false.

A universal assent under such conditions can be due only to evidence of truth forcing itself upon the intellect. For the three conditions which ordinarily induce men to assent to a false proposition are the diffi-

culty of solving the matter in question, lack of attention to it on account of its unimportance, and the wish which is father to the thought, inducing men to *think* that is true which they *wish* to be true.

But history bears unmistakable evidence that, with very few exceptions, all men in all circumstances and times have held that sin is a tremendous and odious reality. Now this proposition is easy to understand as we have shown; is all-important for the salvation of souls and even for life on earth, and is something which the generality of men would wish were false; for if it were so, they could do as they list without remorse or fear of the judgments of God. Therefore, sin is a tremendous reality.

Also a lasting civilization, as reason and observation prove, cannot be built upon a fundamental error. But civilization has flourished best where the evil of sin has been most generally recognized and avoided. And this is as it ought to be! For civilization rests on virtuous respect for mutual obligations and rights. Therefore, the conviction of humanity that sin is evil cannot be erroneous.

In the light of all this evidence, it must

now be apparent, how more than justified the Church, Christ, the Prophets and God Himself have been in leveling their denunciations against sin; and how vain and foolish have been the group of rationalists who pretend to believe that sin, if at all evil, is a trifling affair.

But an appreciation of its odiousness in general will not help us much unless we apply the matter to our own lives. Since, therefore, we wish to rise from our evil ways, since the only means of doing so is contrition, since one of the essential factors of contrition is humility, since humility springs from self-contempt, let us consider our personal sinfulness and conceive a contempt for ourselves in view of its hatefulness. Look back across the vista of your life. Conjure up the places you have been in, the persons with whom you have consorted, the occupations and amusements in which you have been engaged, your thoughts, words, deeds, negligences. A sorry spectacle! Perhaps a nightmare of wickedness! See yourself as an abscess, a cancer in God's sight. Your self-abasement need not be in your feelings. For righteousness is not a matter of sentiment. It should rather be

in the will, which can freely abominate a repulsive thing despite the feelings. Do not be deflected from self-contempt by the thought of your natural gifts and accomplishments, your social standing, success, and popularity. For these graces are only a disguise covering moral corruption like a silk and bejeweled garment hiding the sores of a leper. Neither should you take comfort in the thought that the generality of men do not view sin in this light. This is God's view of it; and by Him you shall be judged, not by men. Do not wonder any longer at the extreme view of sin taken by the Saints. They had the right view; you have the wrong. But abase yourself and cry out to God from the depths: "I am a worm and no man; the reproach of men and the outcast of the people because I have sinned against my God."

But lest self-contempt degenerate into pessimism and despair, look up in confidence to the mercy of the Lord.

And in order that you may have this confidence, which along with humility forms that bitter-sweet thing, contrition, which like the nard in Magdalen's alabaster box, soothes and heals and restores to vigorous

health, rehearse with me in conclusion the old and tender story of the Mercy of God.

The Old Testament teaches the lesson of forgiveness over and over again. For instance: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made whiter than snow." "As far as the east is from the west, so far will I place your sins from you." "Be converted to Me with all your heart in fasting, lamentation and tears." "For," says the Prophet, "He is gracious and merciful and rich in mercy and ready to forgive." The history of the ancient Jews is one of repeated mercy after repeated falls.

The burden of the New Testament is the love of God for the sinning. "God so loved the world that He sent His own Son." By St. Paul God is called "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who comforts us in all our tribulations." Christ taught us to say: "Our Father, Who art in Heaven, forgive us our trespasses."

The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, Eternal God, came down from the seat of His Majesty, took our flesh, was born in poverty, lived a hard life, and died on the Cross to save us from our sins.

He told us the parables of the Good Shep-

herd and the Prodigal Son to dissipate feelings of distrust. He cheered the poor sinning woman dragged before Him by the Pharisees, and sent her away consoled. He took Peter back after his threefold denial. He would have welcomed Judas if Judas had not hardened his heart. To Magdalen, prostrate at His feet in the house of Simon, He spoke the words of comfort: "Thy sins are forgiven thee; go and sin no more." And to the poor thief at His side on the Cross He said: "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." Everything in Our Lord's life is proof of the mercy, kindness, consideration, and loving tenderness of God, calculated to arouse in our hearts sentiments of unbounded confidence.

But Christ's death is irresistible in its appeal to our trust. For the Son of God endured the Cross out of personal tenderness for each one of us, that He might save us from hell. Contrast God on the throne of His justice with lightnings and thunders driving Satan and his followers from Heaven to their doom, with this same God on the throne of His mercy trying to allure us to heaven from our doom. In the empyrean on that day of vengeance His eyes flashed;

on Calvary on this other day of mercy they are filled with tears. There, His lips were eloquent with wrath; here, they are tender with pity. There, His arms were upraised to smite; here, they are extended to embrace. There, He said: "Depart from Me, ye cursed"; here, for He says: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Can you resist the mercy of the Lord? David of old could not; and in sackcloth and ashes he repented his sins. Peter could not; and all the days of his life, tradition says, tears flowed from his eyes for his threefold denial of Christ. Magdalen could not; and she flung herself without reserve at His feet. The good thief could not; and cried, full of hope: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom!"

Be like these dear sinners of Holy Writ. Come hither to the foot of His Cross. Press your forehead against the hard wood of it. Let His blood trickle down on your hair. Kiss those feet and say: "Dear feet, that walked so far and wearily for me and now are pierced for me, I love you. Dear eyes of Christ, so beautiful and sad on my account, I long for you. Dear arms of

Christ, out-stretched for me, embrace me. Dear blood of Christ, flowing for me, cleanse me. Dear heart of Christ, broken for me, forgive me. I am yours. Your Cross has conquered me. I am sorry for my sins, I wish I had not committed them. If I had it to do over again, I would do otherwise. By Thy grace I will never sin again."

IV

HELL

I suppose that if you were in a state of sin, you made an act of contrition last Sunday night, in view of the odiousness of sin, and returned to God.

The purpose of this sermon on hell is to offer you a motive (not the best but a very good one), for remaining in God's friendship;—the motive of the fear of hell. Also, in case you have not yet returned to grace, the motive of fear will most likely induce you to retrace your steps.

But I seem to hear one say: "The fear of God is an ignoble sentiment. I fear neither God, nor man, nor devil. God cannot browbeat me into servitude by His threats. 'Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.' Prometheus, the victim of Jove, bound, but defiant, is a noble sight; so also is Milton's Lucifer, burning, but undaunted still. Again, we admire great generals because they did not fear anything. I wish to

emulate them and face hell without quailing."

The attitude of defiance expressed in these words has its rhetorical appeal. But the attitude is founded on a misconception of the fear of hell. Let us correct the misconception and explode the appeal.

The fear of hell which is commended by Christ is not in the feelings, but in the will. Hence it is not a nervous dread that paralyzes the activities of life and replaces its sunshine with gloom, but a prudent foresight that calmly and gravely calculates evil in order to avoid it.

It is not the fear of prostrate passivity or of cowardly flight; but a fear of evil, linked with a courageous determination to resist forces that lead to it.

It is not a servile fear of pain for its own sake, but the filial fear of an angry Father threatening pain.

It is not the fear of a tyrannical God trying to frighten us into slavish subjection, but the fear of a loving God, urging us to consult our honor, duty, and happiness.

It is not the principal motive of service, but God's last resort.

A God without justice would be a mawkish

Divinity, a milk-and-water Deity, like a body of flabby flesh without tough sinews, muscles, and backbone. Indeed God could not be beneficent, loving good, unless He were also holy, hating evil. The love of goodness and the hatred of evil are correlatives. Like shine and shadow they connote each other. A lover of goodness, strictly speaking, cannot be tolerant of evil. His so-called tolerance is mercy, not indifference. The Calvinists and Puritans made God all harshness; modern sentimentalists are making Him all softness; and there is not much choice between the two extremes. I, for one, could not esteem God's Goodness if I did not dread His Justice and Holiness. I could not love unless I feared. Fear is the alloy which solidifies the gold of love. Even in human love there must be the element of fear. Lovers fear each other. Their mutual reverential awe gives dignity to their love. Without that their love would degenerate into mere passion and that familiarity which breeds contempt.

And, great generals feared! Ney, Napoleon's Marshal, the bravest of the brave, feared. Foch feared the Germans. Only, theirs was not the fear of prostrate

passivity and paralysis, nor the fear of cowardly flight. It was the fear of iron resistance.

Strange to say, without fear of evil, there could be no courage. For, without fear of evil, courage would not stiffen us to resist it. Some men do not fear evil because they have not intelligence enough to see that it exists or to gauge its proportions. The poppies of "Flanders Fields" did not fear the German hosts at all. And many a cabbage and turnip in many a Belgian cellar was without fear, precisely because it was without intelligence. But who would call such fearlessness courage? Fear creates heroism and explains the paradox of heroes rushing to meet death, precisely because they fear it and wish to avoid it; dashing at guns at the risk of their lives, precisely because they wish to silence their death-dealing thunders.

With these considerations it must appear that the fear of hell, proposed to us by Christ as a deterrent to sin, far from being unworthy of man, is, though not the best motive, a very worthy one. And with the ground thus cleared we may go on now to the consideration of hell as a fearful deterrent to sin.

Last night, in the darkness and stillness of the midnight hour, while most of you were asleep, Christ took me by the hand and led me down through many a subterranean passage, to the red level of the lake of hell. And He said to me: "Son, look at this in imagination, so that you may never endure it in reality."

I stood on the shores of that lake of fire, my feet washed with burning waves; and I looked out across the trackless conflagration, the waste of flames; I saw the "darkness visible"; despair brooded upon the deep, and silence hung like a pall over the hushed domain. I saw souls enclosed, as it were, in bodies of fire; some of them on the surface of the lake and others smothered in the depths: souls like my own.

And I heard the tumultuous clamors of the damned. For a time they were dumb in blank despair. Then they sought relief in blood-curdling screams. But there was no relief in screams; and so they sank back into mute passivity. Their voices rose in a column of sound to the dome of hell, broke against it in impotent defeat, and fell back to the surface of the lake in shattered remnants,—blasphemies, mutual recriminations,

shouts of anguish, obscenities, lamentations of regret and lost hope littering the air. For all eternity this monotonous alternation between suffocating silence and maddening clamor, between the agony of suppression and the agony of expression, will last.

They cursed God, Christ, the Saints; they cursed the day they were born and the mothers that bore them; they cursed the souls that misled them; and themselves for having been misled; they cursed the demons who tormented them; and these in turn ridiculed them with satanic bitterness for their perfidy to Christ who died for them, and for their loyalty to Lucifer who always hated them. Sound was given for the delight of man; how sweet is music to the heart! Sound was given for the expression of beautiful human emotions! Think of Galli-Curci and Caruso! But sound in hell is a pandemonium of noise, splitting the ears and crazing the minds of that gruesome host of the lost.

And I smelled the fetid odor of corruption. The bodies of the damned will be in hell after the General Judgment, piled mountain-high, unbearable to the nostrils and sight. How careful men and women

are on earth, how clean and fragrant! How fearful of the least offensiveness in their persons! What will they do in hell, which is infinitely worse than any cesspool of earth?

And I tasted the bitterness of their regret. They were recalling their habitation on earth and contrasting it with their present one. How commonplace appeared the things of earth when they lived there; but how exquisite now! They were remembering the blue sky and contrasting it with the brazen dome of hell; the refreshing breezes from a lake, and contrasting them with hot blasts from liquid fire; the scent of flowers, and contrasting it with the malodorous fumes of sulphur; the songs of birds, and contrasting them with the dissonant yells of the lost. They were remembering their home, the comfortable bed, the cheery room, the light of lamps, the cozy hearth, where fire was a blessing, not a curse. They were recalling the busy street, the factory, the office; the books which refreshed them in their leisure hours; their friends, their parents, their children. How precious all those earthly objects seemed, now that they were lost! And how the remembrance of them

increased the misery of their present abode!

They were visualizing with anguish the Incarnation and all it means: Bethlehem, Nazareth, Calvary, the Easter Sepulchre, the Church, the Sacraments, the beauty and comparative ease of a virtuous life. Indeed, while they lay on the surface of the fiery lake, mocking demons portrayed the scenes of Christ's life on the dome of hell. The Infant in the crib was there, and Mary, Joseph, the Angels, and the Shepherds. The Saviour on the Cross was there. And the risen Lord. But "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will"; "Father forgive them for they know not what they do," and "He hath risen again, as He said, Alleluia! Peace be unto you; fear not":—these comforting words were not for them any more. Withering curses were showered down on them from those sacred lips of Christ which seemed made only for sweet utterances; and lightning looks of wrath were flashed down at them from those eyes of Christ, which seemed capable only of love. The tenderness, sweetness, gladness, and sublimity of the Incarnation broke their hearts; for it was not for them any more!

And the thought of Heaven crushed them. They saw its far-gleaming parapets in the sky. They heard distantly floods of music pouring down from its high mansions. They imagined the continual festivities at spiritual banquet-boards. They remembered the heart-breaking beauty of God. And though they hated Heaven, they were tormented at the loss of it. They could be there in an ecstasy of delight. They were here in an ecstasy of never-ending pain.

I felt in imagination the fire that burned them. Fire is the most intolerable of the elements. People will jump from a high window to ruin, to escape fire. How long can you hold your finger in a candle-flame or your hand on a red-hot stove? The very thought of doing so makes your palms sweat. St. Laurence on his gridiron! What were his tortures to theirs? His lasted for a brief time; theirs will continue forever. He became callous to pain; they grow more sensitive to it. He suffered for a noble cause; they were enduring punishment for sin. He was comforted by the consolations of God; they were desolate under the weight of God's hate. He was sustained by the high

hope of eternal bliss; but no beatitude was awaiting them.

And the eternity of it all! That's the thought that staggers us. Where there is hope, there is life. But there is no hope in hell. "Leave hope behind who enter here," is written over the entrance to hell. Take all the sands on the shores of the seven seas; let each grain represent a billion years; count the sands if you can; the sum of them all would represent only the beginning of eternity. Have you ever spent a sleepless night? Well, what is the maddening anguish of it in comparison with a sleepless eternity? The poet calls sleep "sore labor's bath, balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course." But there will be no sleep throughout the endless night of hell. Have you ever endured the pain of a dentist's bore on a live nerve? You squirm if it lasts for a minute. What would you do if it lasted forever? Yet, "ever, never!" is the sing-song of hell. Ever-lasting, never-ending!

But worse than all the pains of sense is the loss of God. On earth men get along without God because on earth they enjoy a thousand images of God in the form of ma-

terial blessings. But in hell there will be neither God nor His images. Man is made for the good, the beautiful, and the true. He longs for them always. They are the breath of his nostrils. But in hell there will be no goodness, no beauty, no sweetness, no truth except the awful truth of damnation. Tantalus, parched for the water which is just beyond his lips, is a faint image of the cursed soul thirsting maddeningly for the fountain-head of life, God, whom he will never enjoy. If lovers die of broken hearts on account of separation from each other; how will the soul survive banishment from the unbearable beauty and lovableness of God? Indeed it would perish of the ache of loss in an instant were it not miraculously sustained, so as to endure the ache without end. And that ache is there, though the soul now hates God. Indeed, its hate is the worst part of the ache. That it should abominate so adorable a God is the climax of its pain. Christ's dereliction on the Cross, which forced Him to cry: "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me," gives us an inkling of the abandonment of the damned from whom God has been torn like a heart from a breast. Have you ever experienced

extreme desolation when God seemed to have withdrawn Himself from you? What must be the desolation of a godless hell!

This is a faint and halting description of what was pointed out to me by my Divine Mentor Christ, at whose side I stood in meditation on the shore of hell. And He said to me: "Child, I show you this in thought that you may never see it in reality." And what He said to me then, I say to you now.

But one may say to me: "Isn't this vision only a dream? Do you mean to say that it represents a reality?"

Some men deny that hell is or can be a fact because if it were, it would be against the Justice and Goodness of God.

Justice, they say, requires that a punishment should not be out of proportion to the offence. But an eternal, unbearable punishment is out of proportion to a sin which may be momentary and at worst does not last long. Therefore since God is just, hell is impossible.

There are two elements in sin: namely, the physical and the moral. The physical is the bodily or spiritual activity of the sin. The moral is a sin's offensiveness to God. The physical element lasts only for a time

and is finite. But the moral element of sin is infinite. For an offense is to be measured by the dignity of the person offended. But God, offended by sin, is infinite in dignity. Therefore, a mortal sin is infinite in offensiveness. Hence hell, a punishment infinite at least in duration, is not in excess of the deserts of a mortal sin.

Also, a law without a sanction is no law. "Sanction" signifies some adequate means of having the law kept. It is either reward or punishment. It is evident that God's law must have a sanction. But without hell there would not be a sanction to God's law. For since as a matter of fact multitudes of men break His law gravely and frequently in spite of hell, which they believe to be a fact, it is surely reasonable to conclude that if hell did not exist, God's law would not be kept at all. Hell is necessary as a sanction; and what is necessary for the maintenance of God's law is just.

Only grave sins, done with full knowledge of the sin, full deliberation and consent, are punished with hell. For this reason, objections to hell on the plea of the inculpable ignorance of millions of barbarians, who have not been enlightened; and

on the plea of strong passions which carry men off their feet, fall to the ground. However, though passions are strong in a man, he can still deliberate and control his actions, as we know by personal experience. Environment, heredity, circumstances, and animalism give a strong impulse to sin, but do not, as a rule, destroy liberty. Secondly, a man is responsible for his fall if he does not employ the help of God's grace; and does not avoid the occasions of sin.

Neither is hell against the Goodness of God. Both the Goodness of God and hell are revealed truths; therefore they cannot contradict each other. It is not so clear just *how* they can be reconciled. For hell is more or less a mystery. However, it is evident that objections to the truth of hell must be false. Their falsity may possibly be understood in the light of the following points:

First, in defending the Goodness of God care must be taken not to deny His other attributes; *e. g.,* His Freedom, Justice and Holiness. For the latter are as essential to the nature of God and as admirable as His Goodness. But one who rejects hell because it does not harmonize (so he thinks)

with divine Goodness, is committed to the position of holding that God would not be free to punish a vicious and obstinate sinner with hell, according to the demands of His Justice and Holiness.

Second, a distinction must be drawn between God's goodness *in itself* and *in its manifestations in the world.* Both reason and Revelation prove that God is and must be infinitely *good in Himself.* But God need not *manifest* His goodness in the world in an infinitely perfect or better way or, indeed, at all, because He is free. If God had not created anything, He would still be infinitely good in *Himself.* Hence, the creation of a world with a hell in it (a supposedly less perfect world) carries no implication that God is less good *in Himself.*

As a matter of fact God has been superb in manifesting His goodness in the world. Not to speak of the creation and elevation of the human race to divine sonship through grace, who could have conceived the extravagant idea of the Eternal God becoming Man and living and dying for us? Moreover, He left His Church to take care of us and His Sacraments to cleanse, console, and strengthen us. He dissuades us from

doing wrong by loving admonitions, by the appeal of His Beauty, by promising heaven and threatening hell. And when men sin, He pursues them relentlessly, like the Good Shepherd seeking His lost sheep, doing everything short of forcing their free will to return to His love; so that if they go to hell, it is because they obstinately insist on going there, not because God sends them there.

But would not a world without hell be a still more perfect manifestation of the goodness of God?—No. On the contrary, a world *with* hell is a more perfect world. For, a world without hell would of necessity be also a world without heaven, without free men, and without the Incarnation, the most glorious manifestation of God's goodness. For if there were no possibility of deserving hell, there would also be no possibility of meriting heaven. If men were not free in the commission of sin, they would not be free in the practice of virtue. If sin and hell were not a possibility, the Son of God would not have become man to deliver us from both. Heaven, enjoyed by myriads of souls, the superb gift of free will and the beauty and lovableness of the Son of

God in our flesh; along with the possibility of hell for those who knowingly and freely choose to go there in spite of the loving kindness of God, are a greater manifestation of God's Goodness than a world without hell; but also without heaven, free will, and the Saviour. For would not all the dignity of life be gone if we *had* to be good, were forced into heaven, and compelled to glorify God for all eternity? And would not God be unworthy if He did not want the free love of men and abominate slavish service?

But could not God in His Goodness deprive prospective sinners of their freedom and thus save them from hell, while letting freedom remain in the souls of prospective saints who, He foresees, would merit heaven? No. For it would be against His Justice to decree that men of good-will should sweat, suffer, work, and perhaps undergo martyrdom to win heaven; while the loss of heaven would be impossible to other men, who, if they were left free, would refuse to serve Him. Where would equity come in? The case would be like that of a king who would force honor and wealth on the undeserving, and at the same

time order the deserving to win their laurels by free and painstaking devotion.

Moreover, prospective sinners would be the first to object: "Why not leave us at liberty? It is better to do wrong freely and to be punished for it than to be forced to do right."

But, is it not against God's goodness to create a man who, He foresees, will be lost? No. Indeed, God would be less good if He did not create him. For if such a man should never exist, hundreds of thousands of people who might descend from him would never see the light;—men and women who presumably would serve God well and enter heaven. Why should God prevent this greater good, so as to forestall that comparatively lesser evil? If He did so, He would be less good.

Does not God's goodness require that He should withdraw men from hell after a long period of suffering there? No, for that would destroy the sanction of His law, which, as we have seen, requires a threat of eternal punishment. Also, it would prevent His free exercise of justice, which demands a punishment proportionate in duration to the infinite offensiveness of a

mortal sin. But the worst feature of hell consists in the utter perversion of the lost soul. Such a soul hates God with fullest intensity. Accordingly, it would not come out of hell and love God, if it were given the opportunity.

A supposition underlying many an objector's revolt against the idea of hell is that uncounted multitudes of men are condemned to hell. But is this a fact? Is there anything in reason, observation, or Revelation which proves this to be a certainty? No. I would not wish to be considered a laxist; but would it not seem to be a defeat of the Incarnation if multitudes (or at least the majority of men) were lost? An act of perfect contrition reconciles the soul to God. Who would say with assurance that multitudes of sinners do not make such acts?

If these answers to objections to hell do not perfectly satisfy, it is not surprising. For, after all, hell is more or less a mystery which cannot be wholly explained by reason. However, it is revealed by God. Therefore, despite the fumblings of reason, we know that it is true.

And what is the revealed argument for

hell?—It is drawn from the teachings of Christ.

There are many texts in the Old Testament which state that there is a hell of fire which will never end.

But we shall confine ourselves to the words of Christ. Christ said: "Fear not those who kill the body; but fear ye Him who can destroy both body and soul into hell. If your hand scandalize you, cut it off; for it is better to go into heaven with one hand than with two hands to go into the hell of fire where their worm dieth not and the fire is not extinguished. If your eye scandalize you, pluck it out; for it is better to go into heaven with one eye than with two eyes to go into the hell of fire where their worm dieth not and the fire is not extinguished. If your foot scandalize you, cut it off; for it is better to go into life with one foot than with both feet to be cast into the hell of fire, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not extinguished and where they shall be salted with fire."

Our Lord told us of Dives and Lazarus. True this is only a parable. But since it was intended to illustrate a fact graphically, it would be absurd to suppose that the fact

and eternity of hell could not be concluded from it.

However, we shall satisfy ourselves with the words which He says He will speak to the wicked at the end of the world: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." The text concludes: "These shall go into everlasting fire."

Objectors say that this declaration of Christ proves nothing because the words "hell," "fire," and "eternal" are used in a figurative sense.

But these words are used in a literal sense. For it is a common principle of interpretation that words in a *prose* text are employed in a literal sense, unless positive evidence can be given that the writer was using words metaphorically. If this principle were not true and acted upon, readers would never be sure of a writer's meaning.

Now, while some of the Old Testament passages, descriptive of hell, are poetical, Christ's judicial sentence pronounced against the wicked on the day of doom is *prose*. Indeed it is most prosaic and literal. For what should be more prosaic and literal than the pronouncement of a judge!

Therefore, according to the general rule of interpreting language, Christ's words, "fire," "hell," and "eternal" must be taken literally unless it can be clearly shown that, by way of exception, Christ, in using these words, was speaking in metaphors. But this cannot be shown. For the rationalistic arguments against an eternal hell of fire, drawn from considerations of God's Justice and Goodness, are futile, as we have seen. Rationalists sometimes add another argument: namely, that material fire cannot burn spirits. But it cannot be demonstrated that this is impossible. Besides, after the Last Judgment, also the bodies of the damned will be in hell.

If we had nothing but the words of Scripture, taken by themselves, our proof for hell would not be so strong. But we have also the orthodox literal interpretation of the scriptural words on hell, given by billions of Christians from Christ's time to our own, and by practically all Christians up to the time of the Reformation. Tens of thousands of these men were learned; many of them were geniuses. First, hell-fire is not a thing they believed in because they naturally liked to. Second, presum-

ably they weighed the evidence before assenting to it, because the question of hell is so important and practical. Third, the revealed evidence for hell is not so difficult to understand. Fourth, belief in hell has helped civilization because it tends to induce men to live up to their obligations and to respect the rights of others. Now the observance of obligations and rights is the foundation of civilization. These four circumstances attending the universal belief of Christian peoples in hell lend to that belief an argumentative force which cannot be dissipated by a wave of the hand or a sceptical smile.

The Catholic Church has always taught an eternal hell of fire: and a formal declaration of it is contained in one of the earliest Councils.

Material fire in hell is a matter of Catholic Doctrine, or, to say the least, what is technically called "Theological Certainty," to deny which would be unworthy of a true child of the Church. However, it is not said by the Church that all the accidental attendants of fire, *e. g.,* smoke and flames, are in hell. Her doctrine is that the *essence* of fire is there. True, even the best of

physicists do not know precisely what the essence of fire is. But they do know at least that it is something *material.* Therefore, we Catholics must hold that the fire of hell is material; and, since it is intended to be a punishment of sin, the pain of it must be in excess of anything we can imagine.

But there is such a difference between knowing a truth and appreciating it! In the light of the foregoing arguments we know the fact of hell; but do we appreciate it?

If we were told that the people of another planet living millions of miles away, or millions of years ago, were in hell, the truth would not come home to us. But the truth of hell strikes us when we consider that men and women like ourselves, of our own time and city, who but lately walked the streets, cheery, energetic, looking in at show windows, present at the theatre, breathing the same air as ourselves, enjoying the same pleasures, to whom we said: "How do you do?" and who saluted us in turn, may be in hell at this moment, while we are here speaking of them. Possibly, while friends and relatives were attending their funeral, showering them with flowers and compli-

ments, and burying their bodies with pomp, they were already buried in hell! Oh, if one of them could come back, an acquaintance, a friend, possibly a relative of yours, all in flames, and, taking my place on this stand, would preach to you of hell,—how surprising it would be, how awful, but also how salutary!

What increases our appreciation of hell is the possibility of our going there. To think that those very eyes of yours, looking at me now, may some day reflect in their pupils the flickering flames of hell! That those very nostrils of yours may smell the nauseating stench of hell! That this very flesh of yours may be consumed by its fires! And if you say: I would never offend God mortally; I answer: You cannot prophecy! Though now you may be firm in virtue, you can deteriorate little by little into a condition where you would deliberately offend God mortally; then die suddenly and be lost.

And is it *probable* that you will be lost? Yes, if you are in sin and do not mend; or if, being in the state of grace now, you do not take the means of avoiding sin. Do not say that you have gone along for years in

sin, safely. Do not interpret God's Mercy as indifference. By His Holiness God tends every moment with an infinite impulse of aversion to thrust the sinner into hell. But the exercise of His Holiness is under the control of His Free Will. That explains why the sinning world continues unharmed. God freely chooses to act according to Mercy rather than at the dictate of His Holiness. Perhaps He has spared you thus far because you did not know of hell or did not realize what it means. But now that you have learned the fact and dreadfulness of hell, can you have any assurance that, if you ignore this warning, His Patience and Mercy will not cease and His Holiness have way? God is patient and long-suffering, but He will not be mocked!

Fall down on your knees, therefore, at the foot of Christ's cross tonight, and be happy because you are not in hell. Thank your crucified Saviour for having kept you out of hell to the present moment. Look down into the infernal depths. See myriads of souls probably there, less grievous sinners than yourself. Then look up at His face and ask Him why you have been spared while they were not. He, gazing down at

you through His tears, will answer: "Because I have loved you with an everlasting love." Tell Him that you will love Him and will never sin again.

The first lesson then that we learn at the foot of the cross on the edge of hell, is joy, gratitude, contrition, and love. A second lesson is patience. Everything goes by comparison. How hard our lot in life seems when contrasted with that of the more fortunate! But how easy when contrasted with hell which we deserve. If a cursed soul could come back to earth and try over again, ten thousand martyrdoms would be trifling to it. Now, therefore, with the thought of hell in mind, shall we not carry our cross with a grace? And we who have deserved condemnation, but have been spared, shall we presume to condemn any man, even in thought? And shall we not bear all reproaches, accusations, and condemnations without complaint because they are not as great as our deserts?

A third lesson is zeal. Last night in the stillness and darkness of the midnight hour, while most of you were asleep, Christ took me by the hand and led me down through many a subterranean passage to the red level of

the lake of hell. I stood there at His side. I saw the vision of horror. I feared. I repented my sins. What more natural than that I should have wished to communicate the vision to you? I have done so tonight. No doubt you have profited by my words. Is it not becoming, then, that you in turn should carry the harrowing but salutary news of hell to other needy men?

V

DEATH

On Ash Wednesday the Church says to her children: "Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return."

I see an old man approach the altar-rail. The snows of many winters are on his head, his face is furrowed, his form is bent and his step is faltering. I see a maid in the aisle. Two roses are in her cheeks, her eyes are stars, and innocence, beauty, and youth like an atmosphere encompass her. I see a man, in the lusty forcefulness of maturity, kneeling to the priest. The sinews of his soul are tense with energy, determination shines in his countenance and his heart is strong.

To all of them, the Church, their Mother, says solemnly, kindly, pitifully, but without flattery, with what might seem to some to be a brutal candor: "Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return."

The first time those words were spoken was in the beginning of the world just after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the earthly paradise. For at the garden gate God said to the father of the human race: "In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken. For dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return."

Adam and Eve did not comprehend the full meaning of those words till many years afterwards, when Cain killed Abel. Eve goes forth into the field one day and finds her white Abel lying like a lily in the grass. She smiles to see him resting there, hurries up to him, kneels at his side and cries with the joy of surprising him: "Abel, awake!" But there is no response in opening eyes and smiling lips. She shakes him. But all in vain! Terror seizes her. She hurries off to Adam. Adam comes. But Adam can not rouse Abel from his sleep. And they sit down on either side of their son, in that primeval field, those parents of the human race, away back in the day-dawn of history, with a new terror in their hearts at this new thing. Then Eve, wild-eyed, raising her hands to heaven cries: "What

can this be!" And a voice comes out of the sky and says: "This is death!" And they hide their faces in their hands, weeping bitterly for their sin, which brought death into the world.

Throughout the Old Testament the Holy Spirit insists on the fact of death and the vanity of life, driving home the lesson by a hundred comparisons. Behold, He says, how the sun rises in the east, mounts to the zenith and descends to its western grave. Behold how Spring develops into Summer, Summer sinks into Autumn, and Autumn is wrapped in a wintry shroud. Behold how a rose buds, blooms, and reigns in its damask, fragrant loveliness for a day; then droops, fades, and falls to earth. Behold a rivulet in the mountain-top, a silver thread, leaping from rock to rock. It grows into a stream, spreads out, and deepens to a river, sweeps on majestically through meadows and past cities, until it is swallowed in the illimitable deep. Behold how the arrow springs from its bow, mounts swiftly to its utmost height, hangs for a second in midair, then falls, with spent energy, to earth. Behold a bird on lightning wings; it comes, it is here, it is gone!

Behold how the ship courses through the deep, leaving in its wake a path of foam; the bubbles burst, there is the glassy surface of the sea again, and no one knows the ship has passed. Behold how a waxen candle burns down, down to its stalk, flutters, dies, and its soul mounts in a grey little smoke; then darkness hangs like a pall in the still room;—so will it be with you; for you are born, you grow into youth and maturity, you work, think, love, fight, laugh, grieve, weep, and die; and few there are who know or care that you have lived and loved and laughed and wept and fought and died.

When the Son of God came to earth, far from minimizing the lesson of the Old Testament on death, He emphasized it. "Watch and pray," He said, "for you know not the day nor the hour." "The Son of Man shall come like a thief in the night when you least expect Him. If the goodman of the house knew at what hour the thief would come, he would lock the door and bar the window Be ye wise goodmen and be prepared." And how graphically He portrays the vanity of the rich farmer complacent in his wealth! He gathered his

grain and placed it in barns; and the barns burst; and he built himself new barns and filled them. Then he sat down and thought, good easy man, "Now I shall take my rest!" And a voice said out of the sky: "Thou fool, this very night they will demand thy soul of thee!"

You yourselves most likely have seen this Scriptural picture actualized. A man wears out his life in getting rich. And in the evening of life he leaves his sordid neighborhood and builds himself a mansion in a suburb, on a hill beside a lake. There, he thinks, he will watch the gradual setting of his sun of life. And lo, it shoots down into the west like a rocket from the sky! And the mansion is widowed of its lord; darkness hovers and silence reigns. O cruel irony of death!

What is death? It is separation from everything we naturally cling to on earth. It is separation from home; from mother, father, husband and wife, from sisters, brothers and children; separation from the cheery table, the glowing hearth, the comfortable bed; separation from the warmth and light of the sun, from the blue sky, from mountain, field, and sea; from all colors,

scents, sounds, and tastes; from the busy street, from the business-house, office, and factory; from the theatre and even from the church; from wealth, honor, comforts, and luxuries; from the very body and its faculties. "Naked I came into the world," says Job, and naked I go out of it, stripped to the starkness, the bare isolation and loneliness of my shivering soul.

It is certain that we all shall die. Some philosophers have presumed to deny quite evident truths;—the fact of God, of the world, of their own existence. But never has philosopher denied the fact of death; because death is too evident. My parents have gone before me; maybe, some of my children have dropped off at my side; I feel myself growing older from day to day, and I know that I too shall receive my summons. Some day will dawn which will miss me from the face of the earth, and the sun will peep in at my window and not find me in my room. Some new Spring will return, and its birds will not sing nor its flowers bloom for me. A century hence boys will play their games, youths and maidens will make love, mothers will raise their families, fathers will conduct their business, old

grandsires and granddames will huddle near the fire to keep warm;—all of them doing over again the very things that you and I have done, when we are in our graves. This is a certainty, the thought of which ought to make us pause in our mad rush through the world after the good things of earth, to question the wisdom of dedicating ourselves to enterprises which infallibly will end in dust.

Also it is certain that we shall die but once. Oh, if we should make a failure of life and death, and then could come back from hell to earth and try over again, life and death would not be such a tragedy for those who fail. But this is not the case. For, once dead we are dead forever, and our fate being once determined, it is sealed, for better or for worse, for eternity.

Hence the contrast between the death of nature and the death of man! Nature dies, but it comes to life again. The sun is buried each day in its western grave, only to rise effulgent on the morrow from its sepulchre in the east. Each winter the earth is wrapped in a winding sheet of snow; but each spring it smiles again in its garment of green. Rivers are swallowed up by the sea; but their waters are sucked up into the

sky by the sun and shed on mountain-tops, whence they flow down again to the sea. The rose-bush slumbers the winter long; but afterwards it quickens with new vitality. But the lily of man's natural life never springs again from the sod of his grave.

It is not certain when I shall die. Shall I have a long life or die this year, this month, tonight? Many are taken by sickness suddenly; some are killed. If you tempt God by continuing to lead a bad life, He may cut you off in the blossom of your sins. All of us when young are inclined to throw back the horizon of life as far as possible, and when old, we simply stop thinking of death. And yet while the young *may* die soon, the old *must* die soon. How many of you will hear the sermons of next Lent? Shall I be alive to give them? Almost certainly some of us will be dead. Which? Each is thinking of his neighbor. Why not think of himself?

In face of the fact of death, two schemes of life have been formulated by men. One is pagan, the other Christian. The pagan scheme of life is expressed in the words: "Let us eat, drink, and be merry; for tomorrow we die." The Christian, in those

other words: "Let us stand at the foot of the cross, so as to learn from Christ how to die, and also how to live."

Now, the pagan scheme of life is vain. For it does not make men happy in life and it makes them miserable in death.

For, first, the great majority of men have not the wherewith to eat, drink and be merry. All strive to secure the good things of earth, but few obtain them. The path of life is strewn with failures, whose "bread is spread with ashes and whose cup is filled with tears."

Second, the few who succeed are disappointed with their conquests. For it is a fact of experience that the quest of earthly blessings is more interesting than the attainment of them. The rosy apples of success shine to us invitingly from afar, but when we pluck them and put them to our lips, they turn to the dust of dead-sea fruit.

Third, even the little pleasure that crowns a successful life is darkened and spoiled by the shadow of impending doom. For the worldling on the peaks realizes, sometimes with a dull pain, sometimes with an acute pang, that all his possessions, which he sweated blood to acquire, will be taken from

him in the end. This nightmare of prevision sometimes comes to him in the still, black hours of the night, sometimes at the height of gayety, amid music, flowers, and charming company. He climbed the ascent of success with a high heart, only to see with a heavy heart the descent from the crest of the mountain into the black depths of death.

Finally, death comes. And the worldling who rested his elbows on the pillows of comfort in life will have no pillows to rest on now. But worst of all, he turned his back on God in life. He fears that God now will turn his back on him in death.

Behold the worldling on his bed of death. Cold sweat is on his brow, his eyes are glazed, his mouth is open: and Conscience, standing at the foot of his couch, says to him in mockery, in the words of St. Chrysostom: "Where now is the silken garment of aristocracy? Where now are the flaming torches? Where now the choruses and dances, the feasts and social gatherings? Where now the acclamations of the city, the flatteries of thy friends, and the glitter of the theatre? Where now the drinking-bouts and banquets, and the red wine flowing all night long, the toothsome

morsels, the delicate viands? Where now the swarming parasites and smiling sycophants?" Then that poor soul will answer him: "All these things are gone!"—"Yes, all these things are gone!" Conscience answers. "For they were a dream of the night, and with the dawning of day they have vanished. They were flowers of spring and with the passing of spring they have withered. They were sunset clouds and they have dissolved. They were a silken web and it has torn. They were an iridescent bubble and it has snapped. They were a tree of full foliage; and when the wind struck it, casting down its leaves to the ground, it was left all naked and black. And because the wind of death hath struck thee and cast down thy vanities from around thee, thy honors, bodily comforts, and wealth, thou to art left all naked and alone. Vanity of vanities and all is vanity, except to love and serve God."

The Christian's scheme of life is: "Let us stand at the foot of the cross and learn from Christ how to die and how to live."

Christ's death was the beginning of life and the end of a living death. The world had been a cruel spouse to Christ. For,

what had his life been from Bethlehem to Calvary, but prolonged distress? Born in a stable, pursued into Egypt, obscure in His life at Nazareth, fasting in the desert, laboring for mankind, often in hunger, thirst, and watching, hated by His enemies, deserted by His friends, unthanked by his beneficiaries, agonizing in the Garden, judged and condemned to death, scourged, crowned with thorns and crucified; He had drunk deeply of the chalice of bitterness. Hence, it was that, with a sigh of relief, he turned from the world and, leaning His head in spirit on His Father's breast, exclaimed: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

And many a Christian's life is a living death. Poverty, suffering, work, obscurity, mental worriment, tears, are the lot of multitudes. If they try to bear their hardships patiently, like Christ, death to them will be a relief. Brethren, if your life is hard, raise your eyes to Him, be like Him. Then when death comes, you will say with joy in your heart: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Christ died to give us the courage of example. The psychology of example stands

out on all the pages of history. Mediocre men rush into the arms of death like heroes if they are led in the charge. God could have subjected us to the doom of death and then let us face it alone. But, just as a mother, giving medicine to her child, tastes it first to encourage him, so God underwent death to inspire us to accept it. And now the whole Christian world with the crucifix before it, finds the thought of death bearable and encounters the reality of death with calm courage.

Christ died because, loving us, He wished to be like us, and in particular to taste the bitterness of our death. Now, we ought to reciprocate, and loving Him, wish to die as He did. With this thought in mind, the Saints would have preferred death to an exit from life without death. Many a time no doubt you have stood in spirit at Christ's deathbed on Calvary, regretting that you could not have shared it with Him in reality. Well, save your regrets! For you will share it with Him some day. For some day you will be stretched on the cross of your deathbed, the sweat of mortality on your brow, your hands and feet and body pierced with pain, your heart and mind per-

haps distraught like His. Naturally we shrink from death, but supernaturally now we look forward to the day of our death as the consummation of our heroic aspirations, as the day when we shall be most like Christ.

And we are strengthened in our heroic anticipations by the certainty that, just as we have stood devoutly in spirit at His deathbed during life, so He will not fail us in death. He will be there, consoling us. And His Mother, whom we comforted in spirit many a time on Calvary, will comfort us. And St. Joseph, the patron of a happy death; and the Angels and saints will be with us, encouraging us to the end.

Christ died that the world might live; and Calvary was His hill of victory. Was there ever any conquest comparable to His? Moses saved one people from the captivity of Egypt. In secular history great captains delivered nations from foreign yokes or spread empires. But Christ fought the battle of the whole human race, against the gates of hell, opening the gates of a heavenly kingdom,—fought it and won. Who would not wish to have part with Him in this epic of eternity! We can have part in it by living with Christ, but especially by dying

with Him. For just as the death of patriots saves nations, so our death in union with Christ's delivers the world. God could have dispensed with our coöperation in the salvation of mankind, but He has sweetly condescended to allow us to die with Christ, that the world may live.

Then our own sins to atone for! It is a debt we all owe. Who would wish to evade the payment of a just debt? Death is the payment of the debt of Original Sin and also of our own personal sins, many and grave. It is not right that Christ should have paid the whole debt. Let us be ready to pay our share and welcome death when it comes.

Finally, after His death Christ began to live. On Easter morn His sepulchre was resplendent and his body like the sun. His face was radiant and His heart aglow. And from that day to this, rapture unspeakable has been His lot.

His resurrection is a symbol of ours. Our heart is made for happiness. We cannot help longing for it. God placed that desire in our heart. He is responsible for it. Hence unless He is a God of unspeakable cruelty (a blasphemous and absurd supposition), He must give us an oppor-

tunity of actualizing our desire. But we know that perfect happiness is impossible in this life; therefore, there must be a next life of felicity. Of that life we shall taste in our souls soon after death if we are good. And, at the end of the world, we shall taste it also in our bodies. For the resurrection of the body is an article of Christian Faith. Referring to it, Job, who had spoken those harrowing words about death: "I will spread thy bed with moth and cover thee with a coverlet of worms," spoke these other consoling words: "I know that my Saviour liveth, and on the last day these hands of mine will be clothed in their own flesh, and with these very eyes I shall see my Saviour."

From Christ, the Christian learns how to die. From Him he also learns how to live. He does not fear death immoderately because he has fixed his eyes on The Fearless One. Death to him becomes bearable and sweet. So, also, does life! We have seen that the worldling's attitude towards death intensifies the bitterness of death without sweetening life. The Christian's attitude sweetens death and sweetens life. It has been said that Christianity, by directing the thoughts of men to death, brightens the

sombre colors of death, but at the same time casts a sombre shadow over the brightness of life. Nothing is farther from the truth. For the true Christian's life, like his death, is the brightest. The true Christian is the only one who has a right to eat, drink, and be merry. For, he is right with God, he has looked death in the face, staring the grizzly monster out of countenance. Hence, he is in a position to get the most out of life. If he is in distress, he bears it patiently, knowing that it will soon end. If fortune favors him, he enjoys himself heartily; being always ready, however, to give up the good things of earth when God chooses to withdraw them.

Here, Brethren, are the two schemes of life; the pagan's and the Christian's. It is not hard to see which of the two you ought to choose. Make your choice accordingly. "So live," therefore, as the poet says,

"That when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,

Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

So live, that when the priest says to you for the last time: "Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return," you may be able to say to him: "Father, to me life has been real, life has been earnest,

"'And the grave is not its goal.
Dust thou art, to dust returnest
Was not spoken of the soul.'"

So live that when your time comes, you may say with Christ: "It is consummated." My life is done; my task is finished. It is very imperfect, but I have done my best. Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit, full of humility, but also full of confidence.

VI

JUDGMENT

"Vexilla regis prodeunt
Fulget Crucis mysterium."

How many times in holy week these glorious words of the Latin hymn have thrilled us in the shadow of the Cross!

The coronet of thorns, the armorial bar of the spear, the heraldic device of the Inscription on the cross, and the royal red of Our Saviour's blood,—these form the coat-of-arms of Christ upon the banner of the cross, flapping for two thousand years from the hill of victory over the plains of the world!

"Christ shakes His banner from the flag-staff of the Cross,
Emblazoned with His sufferings which mend our loss."

Today in the world the cross is paramount. You cannot down the cross. It seems to tumble from its place with the

shock of enemies at its foot; but look up again, and lo, from amid the storm-clouds rolling away, it stands erect shining in the sky! At birth we are signed with the cross. In death its image lies on our breast. It hangs on the wall at home, it looks down on us from the altar of God, it is the red sign of the hospital, it is imaged in the hilt and blade of the sword, it surmounts the crowns of kings. Finally, on the last day of the world the cross will be in the heavens. "And the kings of the earth will reverence it, the proud men of the earth will fall down before it, and the enemies of the cross will lick up the dust." But those who love the cross will exult. And the phalanxes of the just with the cross above them, Apostles, battalions of red-stoled Martyrs, companies of Virgins in white, and Confessors innumerable, to the sound of the military music of Heaven, will march into the City of Eternity, beneath the triumphal arch of victory, chanting in multitudinous harmony:

"Christ shakes His banner from the flag-staff of the Cross,
Emblazoned with His sufferings which mend our loss."

Christ Himself describes the day of doom, the day of His victory contrasting so vividly with the day of His defeat on Calvary. Let us contemplate the scene described by Christ, in order that, if the odiousness of sin, the fear of hell, and the fear of death have not induced us to leave our sins and live a rational life, the fear of God's judgment may at last have that salutary result.

In St. Matthew we read: "When Jesus was sitting on Mt. Olivet, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, Tell us what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the consummation of the world. And Jesus, answering, said to them: Nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom and there shall be pestilences and famines and earthquakes in places. Now these are the beginnings of sorrows. And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be moved. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power

and majesty. And he shall send His Angels with a trumpet and a great voice; and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest parts of heaven to the utmost bounds of them. . . . And all nations shall be gathered before Him, and He shall separate them one from another as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and He shall set the sheep on His right hand but the goats on His left."

In order that this panoramic description of the Last Day may produce in our souls the wholesome fear of God's Judgment which Christ wished to arouse, let us consider: first, what precedes the Judgment; second, the Judgment itself; third, what follows it.

According, then, to the testimony of Christ Himself, the sun will be darkened, the moon will become like blood, stars will fall from heaven, the earth will quake. Volcanoes will belch forth their fires, rivers will leave their banks, oceans will flood the lands, pestilences will scourge the people, wild animals will hurry from their forest fastnesses in trepidation for comfort to the habitations of men, children will lament,

wives will cling to their husbands, and husbands will blanch with unearthly dread of the things that are to come.

Then from the four quarters of heaven a conflagration will sweep across the earth, drinking up seas, rivers and lakes, blackening the beauty of hills and fields and wiping out the habitations of men;—the hovels of the poor and the palaces of kings.

And when all living things are destroyed, the heavens open and an Angel of the Lord comes, trumpeting the dead back to life; and at his call the earth and sea give up their dead.

Come with me for a moment to the place of tombs and see two men, a saint and a sinner, rising from the dead. Here they lay, side by side, for years, alike in the drab desolation of the grave. But now how changed they are! For the just man springs like a lily; and the sinner like a rank weed, from the sod!

Now raise your eyes and see the scene of Judgment Day in its sublime expansiveness. See the billions and tens of billions of men and women, just risen from the dead, in their first awed experience of this new life; the strangest of all strange hosts,

seeming to stretch out to infinity, as still as death, paralyzed with fear, in the dread silence of expectancy! At a sign of command from the empyrean they begin to move; then hurry on like ghosts, kings running side by side with slaves, and queens with serving maids, to the fated valley of Jehosaphat. Here, when all are shepherded, an angel with a wand, like a flash, separates the good from the bad; the good he places on the right hand; the bad, on the left. Then the great white throne is set in readiness for the King.

For a moment before the coming of the King, the wicked look across the intervening space at the good and grieve at the contrast between them and themselves. According to the Book of Wisdom: "They are troubled with terrible fear and are amazed at the suddenness of this unexpected salvation; saying within themselves, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit: 'These are they whom we held sometimes in derision and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness and their end without honor. Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the Saints. What hath

pride profited us, what hath the boasting of riches brought us! Those things are passed away like a shadow, and we, being born, forthwith ceased to be and have been able to show no mark of virtue but are consumed in our wickedness.' "

But the time for remorseful reflections is brief. Suddenly the heavens open, and the Son of Man comes with His Angels in the clouds of heaven to pronounce judgment on mankind. Oh, the joy, touched with fear, of the just! Oh the dread of the bad! "Let the mountains cover us," they exclaim. For Christ is marvellously changed! On the first Christmas night He came in weakness and poverty; but now His advent is in might. Imperial Rome and Greece would have nothing to do with Him. Now, they would grovel and lick His feet. Through the centuries the great world of war, civil government, society, science, education, and wealth looked down superciliously on Him and His old-fashioned Church. Now, it looks at Him with awe and dread. For that head that was crowned with thorns is circled with light; those eyes that were dimmed with the death sweat, with blood and with tears, flash lightnings

from the sky; those lips that were dumb in defeat will soon be eloquent with wrath; those ears that were offended with insulting oaths are regaled with angelic choiring; those hands and feet and side which were pierced, shoot forth five flashes of crimson; and that body, in which says Isaias, "There was not a sound spot from the crown of His head to the soles of His feet," is bathed in a halo of golden mist! And His Cross is there, not blood-stained, but effulgent! And Seraphim and Cherubim are adoring, instead of Pharisees and soldiers mocking Him! "O God," the sinner cries, "what a change!"

Christ takes his place on the throne. The Book of Life and Death is opened. In a moment of divine intuition He reads the records of the world. The Book is closed; —and the Lord stands to pronounce the sentence of eternity.

Turning first to those on His right hand, with a look of infinite benignity, He says, "Come, ye blessed of my Father and possess the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for when I was hungry, you gave me to eat; when I was thirsty, you gave me to drink; when

I was naked, you clothed me; when I was a stranger, you took me in; when I was sick and in prison, you came to me." And when these say: "Lord, when wert thou hungry, and we gave Thee to eat; thirsty, and we gave Thee to drink; naked, and we clothed Thee; a stranger, and we took Thee in; sick, and we visited Thee; in prison, and we came to Thee?" He answers: "When you did it to the least of my servants, you did it unto me. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

Oh, they have forgotten their little acts of charity; the food and drink they dispensed, the clothes they distributed, the comfort they gave, the consoling words they spoke, the tears they wiped away, the broken hearts they cheered, the feverish pillows they smoothed. They have forgotten all these trifles of fraternal charity. But *He* has not forgotten. And they look on Him and love Him for His faithful and tender remembrance.

Turning then with wrath to those on His left, He says: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For when I was hungry, you gave me not to eat; when I was thirsty, you gave me not to drink; when I was

naked, you clothed me not; when I was a stranger, you would not take me in; when I was sick and in prison, you would not visit me." And when they say to Him: "Lord, when wert Thou hungry, and we gave Thee not to eat; thirsty, and we gave Thee not to drink; naked, and we clothed Thee not; a stranger, and we did not take Thee in; sick, and we did not visit Thee; in prison, and we did not come to Thee?" He answers: "When you did not do these things to the least of my servants, you did them not to me."

With these words, Christ descends from His throne and takes His place amongst the Blessed. The cursed hear His voice and look at His face; they know that His words are true; they know that there is no appeal; and already the despair of damnation broods over their hearts.

Then to the sound of ravishing music the host of the Blessed like a cloud of white immensity slowly leaves the ground and (to compare great things with little) like a lark, mounting as it sings and singing as it mounts, it rises, flooding the earth with hosannas, alleluias of joy, paeans of thanksgiving, and lyrics of love.

It is then that the damned, realizing for the first time what all this means; appreciating for the first time fully the amiability of Christ and His Saints; understanding with anguish that all beauty, all sweetness, all truth and goodness are passing with Him away from them, raise their eyes and hands despairingly and cry: "Farewell to Thee, O lovely Christ, farewell."

Higher and higher ascends the cloud. It becomes a speck in the blue; the music faints in the still distance. The heavens open. The cloud is taken in. The heavens close. And the first part of the world's history, the story of virtue and its reward, comes to an end.

Now turn your gaze back to earth. See the black mass of damnation with innumerable demons, fiery-eyed, encircling it like the red edge of a thunder-cloud. With whips of scorpions they drive their multitudinous victims toward the pit. These hold back from their fate. But in vain! And so they gnaw their tongues and dig their nails into their palms, in mute dereliction. Like a black Niagara they rush to the edge of the abyss; pour over it, and are swallowed in the deep. For hours they

seem to flow and fall. But now the cursed work is consummated. The maw of hell is glutted. The damned are submerged and smothered below. And the demons hover around the edge of hell, loath to descend. But the heavens open, and a Seraph of the Lord wings his flight from the zenith to earth. They quail at the sight of him. He drives them to their fate. With the strength of ten thousand men he closes the Titan gate of hell, turns the key of eternity in its lock, withdraws the key, snaps it into four pieces, and hurls them to the four quarters of the universe. Then, like a streamer of the northern morn, he flashes back to the empyrean; the heavens open for the last time; he is taken in; for the last time the heavens close; and lo, an eternity of bliss begins above, an eternity of woe begins beneath; and the great round earth, all blackened and seared by the curse of God, rolls on, with its cargo of damnation, through the silent, rayless stretches of space.

Brethren, this is a halting, clumsy attempt to describe the end of the world, the day of doom, the closing chapter in the story of mankind. If we consider the Last Judgment merely as a vision (not as a fact),

we must admit that there is nothing in any literature to compare with it in sublimity. The pageantry of earth, conjured up by the mystic wand of the greatest poets, is ridiculous by comparison. The Evolutionist's dream of the beginning of the world, of prehistoric fires brooding over boiling oceans, of a new earth racked with earthquakes and belching volcanic fires, of mountains shouldering their way up from the level, of mammoth beasts infesting the earth and nibbling the topmost leaves of gaint trees; this vision of the beginning of the world is paltry at the side of the vision of the end of the world. Even the Inspired Book has nothing equal to it in sublimity. Christ at Bethlehem is tender, melting us to love; Christ in His public life is pitying, winning our confidence; Christ on the Cross is tragic and pathetic, touching the cords of our sympathy; Christ in His resurrection and ascension is triumphant and glad, filling us with joy. But Christ as Judge of the living and the dead is sublime, inspiring us with profound awe.

But the climax of the drama of life is divinely ironical as well as sublime. How the pride of earth will be humbled! How

the ostentation of empires will be made ridiculous! And how the satirical demons must laugh, now, at the puffed conceit of the mighty, who hereafter will grovel, ready to kiss the shining garments of the exalted humble and poor!

But the Last Judgment is more than a vision. It is (or rather will be) a fact. If we could sit in an audience, viewing the pageant of doom, we should enjoy its dramatic appeal. But we ourselves must take part in the play. As a matter of *fact, you* will rise from the grave; *you* will look down at yourself and see either a body of beauty or one of loathsomeness; *you* will see the human race gathered in Jehosaphat; *you* will be either on the right of Christ or on the left. With those very eyes of yours, you will see the Judge either beaming or frowning at you. Those very ears of yours will hear either: "Come you blessed," or "Depart from me." *You* will either ascend with the company of the Blessed or be left behind for Satan and his angels. *You* will either be steeped in ecstasy or torn to shreds with despair. Think well on it; the Last Judgment will be a *fact* for *you!*

Moreover, it depends on you what your

fate shall be. In this lies the whole dignity and terror of human life:—that we are free; that with us rests our ultimate destiny. You are not free to succeed or not in this life, but you are free to be either on the right hand of the Judge or on the left. Why, therefore, should you stand in awe of the power, immensity, and ancient centuries of Nature? Nature is a necessary agent; it works precisely and sublimely. But there is no inspiration in it, for it has no choice. But you, an atom, an invisible ant in an obscure corner of the universe, infinitely inferior to the universe in power, are infinitely superior to it in dignity because you are free to decide the part you will play in the drama of Judgment Day.

But one condition necessary for a propitious decision as to your place in the valley of Jehosaphat is Confession. Christ said to His Apostles: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." By these words He set up the tribunal of the confessional. For, unless sins are confessed, how can the minister know whether they are to be forgiven or retained? The tribunal of confession is hard to human na-

ture; but in comparison with the tribunal of the Last Day, it is easy.

At the tribunal of doomsday, sins will be manifested to the whole world; at the tribunal of the confessional they are told to a single priest. There Christ will be a God of justice; here He is a God of mercy—the same Saviour who welcomed Magdalen and the other poor woman of sin, who forgave Peter, spoke words of consolation to the Good Thief, who compared Himself to the Father of the Prodigal Son and to the Good Shepherd, seeking the lost sheep; who in the person of His priest receives us with as much tenderness as He received men and women of yore. There, the sentence will be: "Depart from me, ye cursed." Here, it is: "I absolve you of your sins; go in peace; your sins are forgiven you." From that tribunal the sinner goes forth into hell; from this, he comes out into the church to kneel before the tabernacle, his soul suffused with the peace of God. Confession is hard to nature; but how easy it is in comparison with the judgment at the end of the world. Humble yourself now, that then you may not be shamed.

A second condition which will decide your

final fate is fraternal charity. Christ will say either: "When I was in need, you helped me; for when you aided the least of my servants you aided me"; or the opposite. Fraternal charity is to be the Open Sesame to the Kingdom of God. Christ does not mention contemplation and mortification, much less, wisdom and culture, as keys to heaven; but the plain, ordinary works of feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting the sick: works which we all can do. However, we must perform these acts in imitation of Christ and with the faith that we are doing them for Him. If we wish to hear Christ say to us: "Come, ye blessed, and possess the Kingdom," we can take no surer means to that end than fraternal charity. Be good to your brethren, and you may hope for Heaven.

And you who are great in the world, fear God! You are the observed of all observers now. Men pay court to you; they tickle your nostrils with incense; they flatter your ears with praises; they bow down to you, listen to your every word with respect. But God's ways are not man's ways, and if you do not serve Him, the tables will be

turned on you on the Last Day, and you will be cursed. And it is so easy for a prosperous man to forget God, idolize himself, and despise his fellowman. "It is harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle." Beware, O great men of this world, watch your step, fear God with wholesome awe.

And for you who are distressed in life, there is hope and joy in the thought of Judgment. One of the purposes of the Last Judgment is that God may justify His ways before the world. On earth His justice is not fully exercised. Often the wicked prosper, and good men are given the cross; but hereafter each shall get his deserts. Christ, who was distressed from birth till death, immediately after death was triumphant, and on the Last Day will reap His glory, judging mankind. So if you bear your lot patiently, on the day of doom you will be glorified before the world, proclaimed His friends, and welcomed into His eternal mansions of bliss.

There, your mind will be steeped in Infinite Truth, your will will be saturated with everlasting love, your heart will be flooded

with exquisite joy, and your body will be beautified. No tears will dim your eyes any more; no lamentation pass your lips any more, no pains will rack your limbs any more; no sickness, no poverty, no fears, no humiliations any more! No death; only life, *life,* LIFE,—a life of white-hot activity and cheer in God, your first BEGINNING AND LAST END.

Brethren, I look out on you tonight. Possibly I shall never see you again in this life, but I know that I shall see you on Judgment Day. I have preached this sermon in order that on that day you may be on the right side. And now I promise to pray for you the rest of this year, the rest of my life, in order that you may be saved. In return, if you think you owe me anything for what I have done for you, pray for me also, that, as St. Paul says, "While I preach to others, I myself may not become a castaway."

THE END

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